FEB. 17

10¢

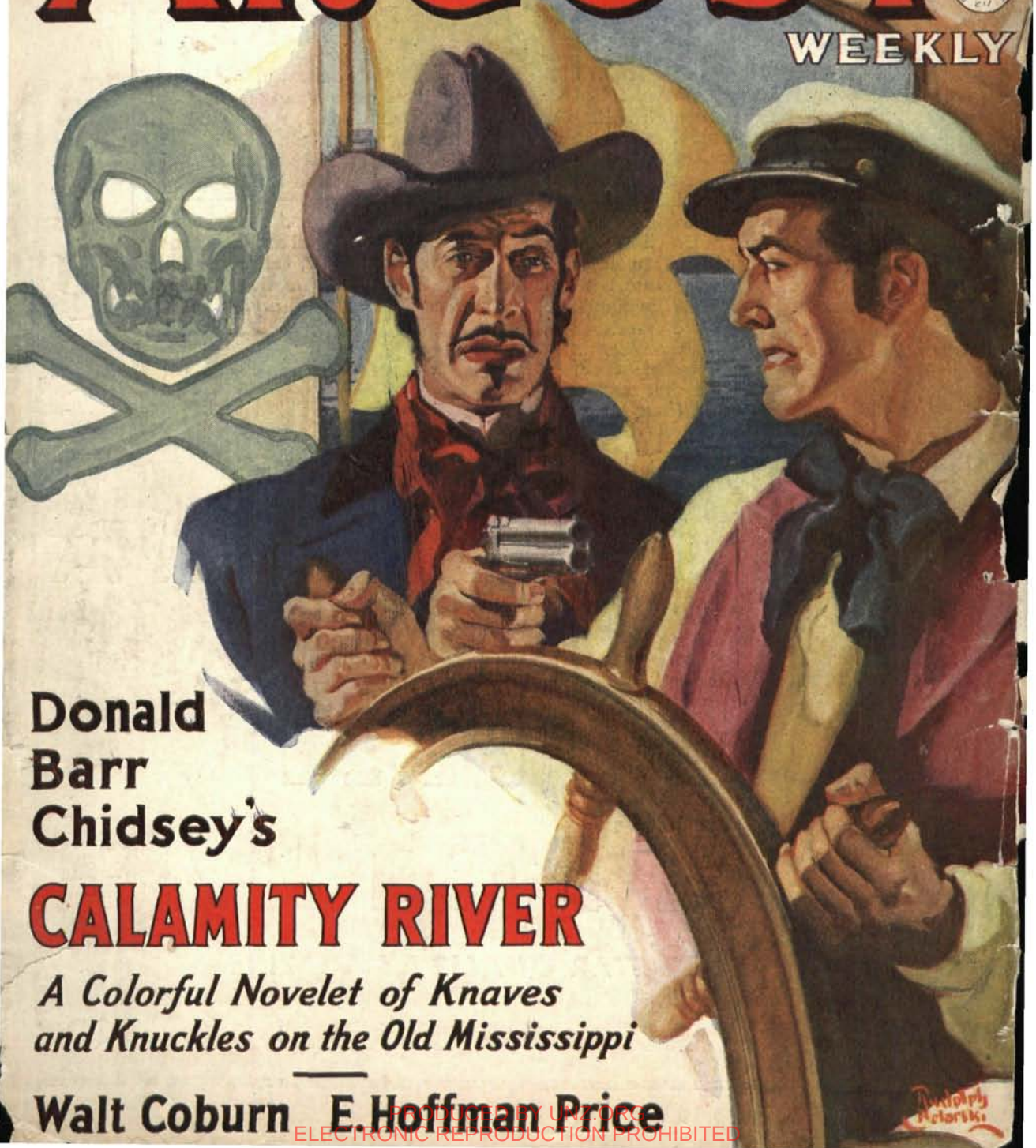
THEN I'LL REMEMBER

Beginning a Vigorous New Novel by **C.M.WARREN**

ARGOSY

THE ALL-STAR MAGAZINE

WEEKLY



Donald Barr Chidsey's

CALAMITY RIVER

A Colorful Novelet of Knaves and Knuckles on the Old Mississippi

Walt Coburn E. Hoffman Price

BODLEIAN LIBRARY
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCOOP!

MYSTIC CRIME-FIGHTER INVADES THE RACKETS

NEW YORK, N. Y., Feb. 7—Lieutenant John Caraway, of Centre Street Headquarters, early this morning received a strange telephone call, from a person calling himself *The Green Lama,* telling him to come to the old Tanner Warehouse. Arriving at the abandoned warehouse, Lieutenant Caraway discovered forty gangsters bound on the second floor. Among them was Mort Lane, New York's Public Enemy Number 1 and right-hand man to The Crimson Hand, a mysterious gang leader responsible for the recent hundred million dollar looting of Cleveland, Ohio, banks. The majority of the Cleveland money was found in the warehouse. *The Green Lama* had vanished.

The gangsters, all facing first degree murder charges, were unable to describe their captor other than that he was dressed in a green monk's robe. They claim that there was a girl and two other men with him, but tell some fantastic tale that *The Green Lama overpowered them single-handed.*

WATCH FOR THE

GREEN LAMA

IN THE APRIL ISSUE OF

DOUBLE DETECTIVE

A RED STAR *QUALITY* MAGAZINE

NOW ON ALL NEWSSTANDS - - - 10c

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To the man who wants to enjoy an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $2,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

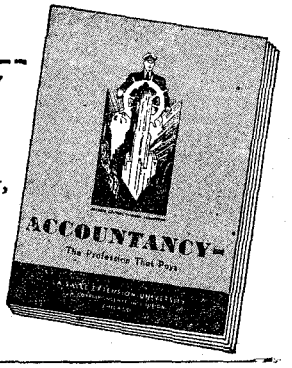
Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained.* It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now.*

Over 1850 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni



LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

4101 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 258-HR, Chicago, Ill.

I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name.....

Address..... *City*.....

Position..... *Age*.....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 297 CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 17, 1940 Number 1

Calamity River—*Short Novel*.....Donald Barr Chidsey 6
There are shoals to navigate tonight; and there's a rendezvous with the bloodiest band of pirates on the old Mississippi. Spin that wheel!

Red Sea Jonah—*Short Story*.....E. Hoffmann Price 31
The skipper who knows Arabs will give his favorite hoodoo a hearty welcome in time of disaster

Then I'll Remember—*First of two parts*..Charles Marquis Warren 44
I have no home, no past, no name. Who, then, are these gunsels and glamour girls who know me so well? Why do they call me millionaire—chiseler—and scoundrel?

Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 72
The Codonas—Royalty of the Big Top

The Devils of Wong Sun—*Short Story*.....Arden X. Pangborn 74
Wise one, the path of certain demons is narrow but not straight, and 'tis paved with gold

The White Oomailik—*Third of six parts*..Frank Richardson Pierce 83
Through treachery, weariness, and relentless cold, one man must fight a bitter battle for two

The Jest of Hamarath—*Short Short Story*.....Garnett Radcliffe 103
An Argosy Oddity

The Whisper Trail—*Conclusion*.....Walt Coburn 108
Spike Lawler makes his first killing and hits the jackpot

Army in Feathers.....Skippy McMullin 102

Argonotes 127

Looking Ahead! 128

Cover by Rudolph Belarski
Illustrating Calamity River

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM I. DEWART, President

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD
3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., 4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE
111 Rue Réaumur

Copyright, 1940, by The Frank A. Munsey Company

Published weekly. Single copies 10 cents. By the year $4.00; in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, $5.00. Other countries, $7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I WILL SEND MY FIRST LESSON FREE

It Shows How I Train You at Home in Your Spare Time for a

GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 years

He has directed the training of more men for the Radio Industry than anyone else.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm certain I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Technician. I will send you my first lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Judge for yourself whether my course is planned to help you get a good job in Radio, a young, growing field with a future. You don't need to give up your present job, or spend a lot of money to become a Radio Technician. I train you at home in your spare time.

Jobs Like These Go to Men Who Know Radio

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians and pay well for trained men. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. *Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and* service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are newer fields offering good opportunities to qualified men. And my Course includes Television, which promises to open many good jobs soon.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio is already one of the country's large industries even though it is still young and growing. The arrival of *Television, the use of Radio principles in industry,* are but a few of many recent Radio developments. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of *Radios get out of date and are replaced.* Millions more need new tubes, repairs, etc. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use and thousands more are being sold every day. In every branch Radio is offering more opportunities—opportunities for which I give you the required knowledge of Radio at home in your spare time. Yes, the few hundred $30, $40, $50 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, in addition to my regular course, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do actual Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training, I send plans and directions which have helped many make from $200 to $500 a year in spare time while learning.

You Get Practical Experience While Learning

I send you special Radio equipment; show you how to *conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important* principles used in modern Radio and Television receivers,

broadcasting station and loudspeaker installations. My 50-50 method of training gives you both printed instruction and actual work with Radio parts—makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make more money fixing Radio sets while learning and to equip you with a professional instrument for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act today. Mail the coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my Course in Radio and Television; show letters from men I have trained *telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money* back agreement. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OBK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

I TRAINED THESE MEN

Service Manager for Four Stores

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N.R.I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M - - - Furniture Co. for their four stores."—JAMES E. RYAN, 1543 Slade St., Fall River, Mass.

Owns Shop, Makes $3,000 a Year

"Before taking your Course I earned about 17½ cents per hour as a truck driver. When I had completed 20 lessons I started service work. During the last year I have made about $3,000 in Radio. I now own my own shop."—KARL KELLY, 306 W. Calhoun St., Magnolia, Ark.

$10 to $20 a Week in Spare Time

"I repaired many Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I have made an average of $10 to $20 a week—just spare time."—JOHN JERRY, 1529 Arapahoe St., Denver, Colo.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON **FREE**

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OBK
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which tells about Radio's spare time and full-*time opportunities and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to be* Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly).

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....2FR

A Tested WAY to BETTER PAY

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nervous, Weak, Ankles Swollen?

Much nervousness is caused by an excess of acids and poisons due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder disorders which may also cause Getting Up Nights, Burning Passages, Swollen Joints, Backache, Circles Under Eyes, Excess Acidity, Leg Pains and Dizziness. In many such cases the diuretic action of the Doctor's prescription Cystex helps the Kidneys clean out Excess Acids. This plus the palliative work of Cystex may easily make you feel like a new person in just a few days. Try Cystex under the guarantee of money back unless completely satisfied. Cystex costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

BIG PAY Selling

Advance cash commissions and 33% bonus writing easy orders, spare or full time. We deliver and collect. No experience or money required. Represent world's largest shirt manufacturers selling to wearer. One year guarantee: half price offer; customized fit. Full line sportswear including slacks and ensembles. Hosiery for men and women. Write for FREE money-making outfit.

ROSECLIFF-QUAKER CORP.
1239 Broadway, Dept. 458 N. Y.

SHIRTS HOSE SPORTS WEAR!

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

LOVE SCOTTIES

They will draw to-gether when face to face, spin around when tail to tail, also will perform many other tricks.

FREE Catalog of other Amazing Low Priced Novelties.

Agents Wanted—Territories Open

JASLOW & GRANT
135 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY

1 PAIR 25¢
SPECIAL 5 PAIR $1.00

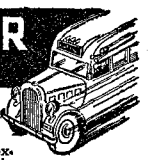
Rheumatism

Relieve Pain in Few Minutes or Money Back

To relieve the torturing pain of Neuritis, Rheumatism, Neuralgia or Lumbago in a few minutes, get NURITO, the fine formula, used by thousands. No opiates. Does the work quickly—must relieve cruel pain to your satisfaction in a few minutes—or your money back. Don't suffer. Clip this ad now as a reminder to ask your druggist for NURITO today.

BE A PASSENGER Traffic Inspector

Train Yourself in Your Spare Time



Write for Free Booklet describing our 21 years' experience in securing jobs for our graduates that pay up to $135 per month, plus expenses, to start. Opportunities in Railway and Bus. Easy, home-study course will prepare you this winter. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE, Div. 5002, Buffalo, N. Y.

THE BLIND SPOT

The all-time famous fantastic masterpiece by

Austin Hall

and

Homer Eon Flint

will appear in the **March** issue of **FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES.** Thousands have read and thrilled to this epic of imagination. ***Its strange, weird plot is so fantastic, so utterly different from any you have ever read, that any attempt to draw a word-picture of it would be inadequate.*** To read it is to enjoy one of the ***most amazing stories in literature!*** Don't miss your chance, buy the **March** issue of

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

The Red Star ***Quality*** Magazine of Science Fiction

Now at all newsstands

15c

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEAF If you have difficulty hearing, you will marvel how clearly and naturally you can hear with the

NEW GEM CRYSTAL

VACUUM TUBE WEARABLE HEARING AID

Works in any position with bell-like clarity. Excellent for church, theatre, or groups. No carbon or interior noises. Individual tone and volume control. Lowest price. Call for FREE demonstration or write for booklet "M-1".

GEM EAR PHONE CO., Inc. 47 West 34th St. New York. N. Y.

TOMBSTONE

Genuine Marble also Granite. Low Prices. Free lettering. Satisfaction guaranteed. Erected in cemetery if desired. Write us now for FREE Catalog of beautiful designs, also samples of stone.

U. S. MARBLE & GRANITE CO.
ONECO, A-45, FLORIDA

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied — Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dpt. H230, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

EARN EXTRA MONEY at Home

Increase your income at home by new, simple Wentworth Tempera Color method. We instruct you and supply you with work. Write today for FREE BOOKLET.

Wentworth Pictorial Co., Ltd., Dept. 186, Hamilton, Ont.

Anything can happen!

That's just what makes railroading so dog-goned interesting. A schedule can be arranged and running smoothly when—blooey—Mrs. MacGillicuddy's pig gets caught in a switch at Whatzis Junction and the best laid plans of men go up the flue.

But seriously, many interesting things do happen in railroading that people seldom hear about—that is—unless they are steady readers of **RAILROAD MAGAZINE . . .**

This up-to-the-minute publication is crammed with articles, fiction, pictures, hard-to-get photos, model-making and camera hints—and all the news about the great railroad industry.

Buy a copy today! It's good, entertaining reading for all—**whether you're in the industry or not.**

RAILROAD MAGAZINE

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

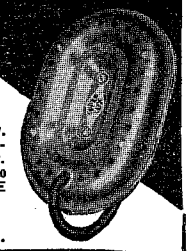
15c

PAYS Up To **178% PROFIT**

This **MAGIC-DISC HEATS WATER INSTANTLY!**

60 second Demonstration.

EVERY HOME CAN AFFORD THIS AMAZING LOW COST NEW IMPROVED ELECTRIC WATER HEATER



Made by an OLD Reliable Company. Amazing New Principle Heats Water Instantly. Just plug in the light socket. SELLS FAST and Pays Agents up to 178% PROFIT. No Risk SAMPLE OFFER. Write at once for details.

THE LUX COMPANY
Dept. H-112 Elkhart, Ind.

Be an ARTIST!

Learn to Draw at Home in Your Spare Time

Prepare now for a fascinating career as an Artist! Our practical method has trained men and women of all ages since 1914. COMMERCIAL ART, CARTOONING and DESIGNING all in one complete course. Trained Artists are capable of earning $50, $50, $75 a week. No previous Art training necessary. FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure and Profit" describes our spare-time training and TWO ARTISTS' OUTFITS included with course. Mail post card now. State age.
Washington School of Art, Studio 712P
1115—15th St., N.W., Washington, D. C.

FREE BOOK gives details

Free for Asthma During Winter

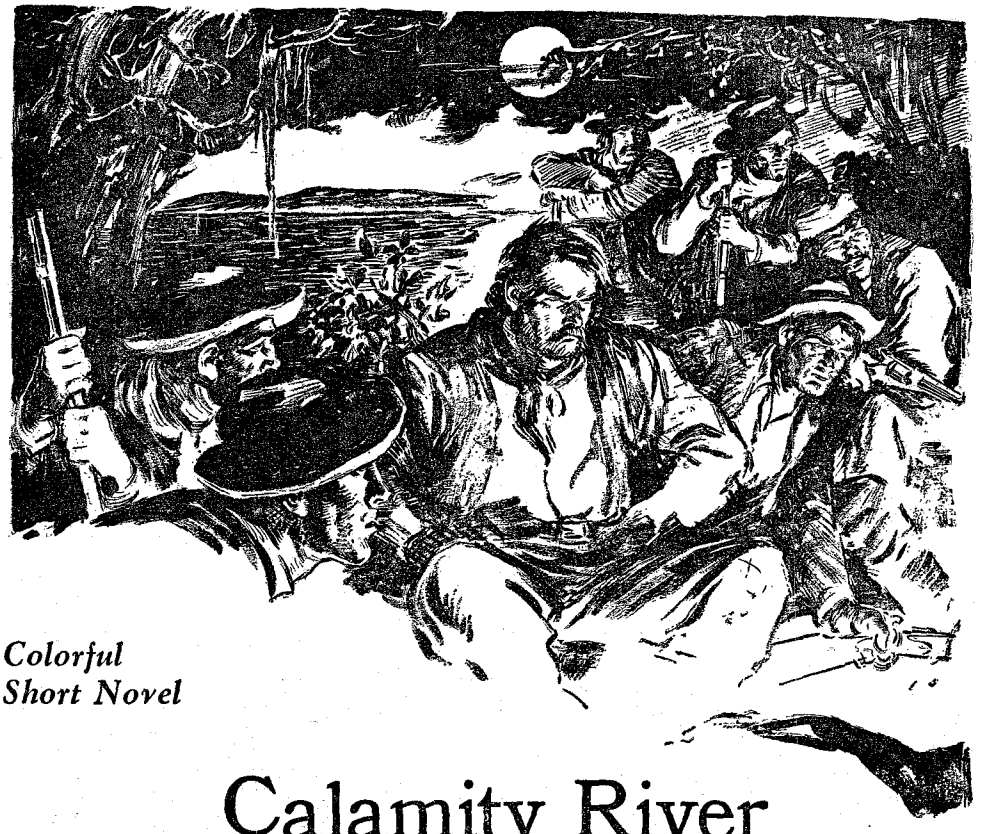
IF you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is cold and damp; if raw, Wintry winds make you choke as if each gasp for breath was the very last; if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address
Frontier Asthma Co. # 127-F Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara St. Buffalo, N. Y.

HAVE YOU READ
FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES
the magazine of stories you couldn't imagine?
Now on sale 15¢ per copy.

IF YOU HAVE GRAY HAIR
and DON'T LIKE a MESSY MIXTURE....
then write today for my FREE TRIAL BOTTLE

As a Hair Color Specialist with forty years' European American experience, I am proud of my Color Imparter for Grayness. Use it like a hair tonic. Wonderfully GOOD for the scalp and dandruff; it can't leave stains. As you use it, the gray hair becomes a darker, more youthful color. I want to convince you by sending my free trial bottle and book telling All About Gray Hair.
ARTHUR RHODES, Hair Color Expert, Dept. 8, LOWELL, MASS.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Colorful Short Novel

Calamity River

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Chaos Is a Quiet Place," "Holocaust Highway," etc.

He knew by heart all the ins and outs of the treacherous and twisting water—every little sandspit, every shifting shoreline. He knew too the deadly reputation of Filmer the pirate. By putting these two pieces of knowledge together he turned deadly perils into the victory that comes only to the brave. A vigorous tale of the Mississippi

CHAPTER I

PASSENGERS UNEASY

THEY were lighting hurricane lamps when Walt brought the *Fair Maid* in at Vicksburg; and Ed Willis, the off-watch pilot, brushing his beaver, remarked politely but with conviction that he had just watched as nice steering as he'd ever seen.

Willis himself was no bungler; but there was envy in his tone when he complimented the younger man. It was the ambition of Willis' life to hold the wheel of a boat throughout a record speed run. Even if it was only a little record, he would like to break it.

"You're certainly not going to take her on down tonight?"

Walt shook his head. He lighted a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The river pirates cheered drunkenly as those two powerful bodies crashed together

cigar, relaxing, while his cub put things in their places.

"Shucks, no. Not with the rise as late as this."

"You've *done* it before."

Walt grinned. "With another man's boat, yes."

Ed nodded and went out.

Walt sat idly watching the men make fast the *Fair Maid,* absorbing the scramble and push at the landing stages. There was a big crowd. There was always a crowd when the *Fair Maid* arrived. A 240-tonner, 220 feet long, brand new, if not the biggest certainly one of the prettiest, and, what was more important, one of the fastest boats on the river, she was worth coming to see.

"So I have a night ashore?" said the cub Max.

He was a small snub-nosed towheaded angel-faced youngster, son of German immigrants in St. Louis, and he fervently believed that Walt Nelson was the greatest man in the world.

"You have a night ashore," Walt confirmed, gravely, not looking at him. "Don't get drunk."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The lad grinned. He was about to step out of the pilot-house, and was already swaggering a bit. It was a wonderful thing to be the cub of a lightning pilot. But he paused. "Here comes that Chalfonte. He don't look so happy."

Walt glanced back over the Texas deck, and frowned. "I didn't know he was aboard."

"There's been a poker game all the way down," Max reported. "I guess he didn't do bad. But he's graveled about something now."

JULES CHALFONTE came from New Orleans. He was tall, heavy, and fattish from easy living. His lips were brilliant red behind his trig black mustache and beard; and his dark Creole eyes were expressionless.

In the light thrown up from the hurricane lamps he moved with dignity, wearing a neat bottle-green coat, a scarlet waistcoat powdered with gold, stockinet trousers cream-colored and very tight, a huge yellow beaver. A diamond glittered in the folds of his black silk cravat, and there were diamonds too on his fingers.

Max blinked when this splendid figure loomed in the doorway, but Walt did not stir.

"Mr. Nelson?"

Walt took the cigar an inch or two out of his mouth and held it there. He nodded.

"I believe that you are part owner of this boat?"

Again Walt nodded.

"Captain Walsh informs me that we are to tie up here for the night. Why?"

"Too dangerous going down. We start first thing in the morning."

"But I'm in a hurry! I understood when I took passage that you were a crack pilot and not afraid of anything."

Max looked swiftly at his hero, but Walt did not blink.

"Perhaps," Chalfonte said softly, "if I was to offer you double fare—"

"No."

"But I tell you I'm in a hurry to get to Baton Rouge!"

"That's too bad," said Walt, and put the cigar back into his mouth.

Below, windlasses rattled and the darkies were singing as they ran cargo ashore. The mud clerk checked something on a long list. Hawsers *squee*-ed wearily, fretfully.

"Now listen to me. When I took passage on this boat—"

"If you don't like it," Walt said, "get off! We're not anxious to have your kind on the *Fair Maid* anyway." Walt was talking around the cigar and his voice was bright and biting with contempt. "What's all your hurry? A few suckers decide it wasn't natural for you to hold such good cards? Somebody gunning for you, maybe? Well, you can't hold us responsible. That's one of the risks of your profession."

The guess was a good one; and, as it so often does, the truth hurt. Chalfonte seemed to have difficulty breathing. His eyes sank almost out of sight in his puffy red face. His hand went under his coat.

"Just what do you mean by that, sir?"

His voice was low and dangerous. Walt, not rising, looked at him sideways. Undoubtedly Chalfonte carried a pistol: his kind always did.

Max picked up a stool and sidled near the door, behind the gambler.

"Just what did you mean? Answer me!"

"I meant what I said. We're tying up for the night, and if you don't like it you can have the rest of your passage money back."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I refer to your allusion that I—"

"Stow it below!" Walt rose, really angry now, and impatient. "I haven't got time for challenges and releaguers. I'm a business man. And incidentally—passengers are not allowed in the pilothouse."

"I demand that you apologize for—"

"Oh, get out!"

This was no way to treat a man like Jules Chalfonte; but the trip down had been a strain, and Walt was edgy.

When the gambler made no reply, Walt knew he had gone too far. Bluster he could have met; but the time for bluster had passed. Chalfonte's rage was cold now and murderous. Walt grew tense as he saw the gambler's fleshy, soft-looking hand coming out from under the coat. Max raised the stool.

Chalfonte meant to shoot. For all his melodramatic appearance, his reputation as a killer was sound, an integral part of his stock-in-trade. He could not let himself be insulted like this. He couldn't have his bluff called.

Then the girl came in.

SHE came with a flouncing of crinoline, a swirling of lace, and her eyes blazed. She ignored Chalfonte, who promptly stowed his gun, removed his hat and made a bow. She did not even see Max.

"What is all this? Are you really tying up here for the night?" She was very pretty, and very angry. "I've got to be in Baton Rouge as soon as possible. My fiancé expects me."

Walt said, "I'm afraid he'll have to wait."

"But—but— He can't! I think you're hateful!" She blinked back tears of rage. "Just because you've lost your nerve— Anyway, there'll be two full hours of moonlight."

"And then what would we do? Tie up near one of the banks, I suppose, and run the risk of being boarded by Hank Filmer and his gang? They've been on a rampage all through the woods for months now, just downriver from here."

The girl did not quail. "If *I'm* not afraid of Hank Filmer, why should *you* be?"

"Because I happen to be half owner of this boat, miss. It's everything I've got in the world, and I don't want to stand by and see Hank Filmer tear it to pieces and then sink it."

"Money, money, money! Do you suppose my fiancé thinks of money while he waits for me in Baton Rouge?"

"I'm sure I don't know, miss." Walt put his hat on. "All I know is that we're staying here until dawn. Now I must ask you both to leave the pilothouse."

"Coward!"

Again Max glanced at the lightning pilot, but Walt only shrugged. Jules Chalfonte made the girl another low bow.

"Permit me to endorse that estimate, miss," Chalfonte said. "I'd gladly shoot the fellow, but he's not worth it."

She tossed him a brief tight smile, and without looking again at Walt she swept out. Chalfonte went after her, walking slowly.

CHAPTER II

THE WHEELS TURN

JUST for the change, Walt had dinner ashore. He had many acquaintances along the river front and was kept busy nodding to right and left, but he noticed that nobody stopped to talk.

There was a lull in the conversation

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when he entered the restaurant, and from time to time during the meal he looked up to catch sight of people staring at him.

But it wasn't until he went into MacDougall's for a nightcap that he found out exactly what they were saying about him.

As such places went, MacDougall's was ordinarily very quiet, and Walt tonight was amazed to see that there had been disorder. He was even more amazed to see his cub, Max of the cherubic countenance, standing with doubled fists in the middle of the barroom. Blood streamed from Max's pale flat nose, and rage flared in his eyes. In front of him a young man was picking himself up from the floor.

Walt moved quickly forward.

"Max! Since when have you taken to brawling?"

The boy turned, smiling sheepishly, wiping blood from his face with a sleeve.

"What's the trouble? What happened?"

"Nothing," Max said, and looked at the floor. His face was ashy.

"Now listen here, if there's anything—"

"I'll tell you what he was fighting about." A man pushed out of the crowd. He was heavy, sweaty, a little drunk. "That other youngster, he said you'd lost your nerve! Said you was scared to take the *Fair Maid* downriver tonight!"

"Oh, he did?" Walt looked at the lad who was getting to his feet. "Well, if he said that, he was absolutely right. I am."

Max almost burst into tears. The sweaty man guffawed.

"You see what I said? Lightning pilot, hell! Why, the big bluff ain't got any gizzard at all!" With the heel of his hand he pushed Walt in the mouth. "Ain't that true?"

Walt said, "Not exactly," and used his left fist.

The uppercut straightened the man, seemed to stiffen him. He rocked on his heels, glassy-eyed. Walt cut a right straight to the point of his chin—and he went down with a crash.

"Not *exactly*," Walt repeated. He threw an arm across Max's shoulders. "Come on, lad, let's step up to the bar. A little liquor will quiet you down. Why, you're trembling!"

"I ain't trembling!"

"All right then, you're not. Have a drink anyway."

OUTSIDE of MacDougall's, it appeared, Max had encountered Captain Eb Lander, owner of the *Southland*, a small sad old steamboat wharfed near the *Fair Maid*. Captain Eb had just come out of MacDougall's, where he was looking for Walt.

Already two days behind his schedule, and fearing to lose a promised cargo at Baton Rouge, he had hoped to hire Walt to take the *Southland* downriver tonight.

In MacDougall's, he told Max, somebody had scoffed at this idea, asserting that Walt Nelson had lost his nerve and wouldn't do any more night piloting.

Captain Eb, knowing Walt— But Max hadn't waited to hear more. Max had charged into MacDougall's and demanded to know who had insulted his boss. The fight was the result.

"That's how stories start," Walt murmured thoughtfully. He drank his whisky. After a while: "How much did Eb say he'd offer?"

"A hundred dollars."

Walt nodded. He could use a hundred dollars, he and George Walsh. A

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lot of the *Fair Maid* wasn't paid for yet, and there were notes falling due.

"Of course, Ed Willis could take her down in the daylight, and they could pick me up at Natchez," he said aloud to himself.

"It'd be a disgrace!" Max was honestly shocked. "It'd be a disgrace for a man like you to handle a tub like that!"

Walt smiled.

"Besides, you got to get some sleep!"

"A hundred dollars is a lot of money, Max. I suppose Eb wouldn't trust his own pilots. The *Southland* ain't so bad. She's not as pretty as our boat, Max, but she ain't so bad."

"She's only got two boilers and she sounds like she was a sick woman! Them engineers don't keep her up right! They don't keep the mud drums clean. There's chips in the doctor half the time, and the gauge-cocks are gritty. If she ever did manage to get a full head of steam on she'd blow to pieces!"

"Maybe. Maybe . . ."

"Anyway, you're not going without me!"

"Keep your shirt on, Max. Here's Eb Lander now."

The skipper of the *Southland* was apologetic, but desperate. He knew he should not be asking a lightning pilot like Walt Nelson to take the wheel of his wheezy old craft, but he needed that cargo at Baton Rouge.

This would be no competition for the *Fair Maid,* which had already contracted for more cargo at Baton Rouge than she could handle. One of the *Southland's* pilots was drunk and the other had refused to risk his reputation on a down-river run before the June rise.

And he had reason.

"Sure," Walt agreed. "It'll be bad. Low water. It's going to be mighty dark, too, after ten o'clock."

"I thought maybe you might be glad of the chance to pick up a little something extra. It'd be worth a hundred to me, Walt. When I was asking around for you they said you'd lost your nerve, but I didn't take no stock in that. I didn't figure it was true."

"Not exactly."

"I get two extry passengers too, if I start right away. That Chalfonte and the Matthewson girl. Both mighty anxious to get going."

"Well, if it's all right with my pardner it's all right with me. Let's go speak to him."

THAT was a little before eight. At eight-thirty Max lugged his boss' carpetbag from the *Fair Maid* to the *Southland.* At eight-thirty-two Eb Lander's boat shivered and softly squealed. Her landing planks were run up, a flag flapped at her jackstaff, black smoke tumbled from her chimneys, her paddle wheels began to clack.

Water, reddened by the glow of her fires, danced and swirled around her as she moved toward midstream.

Walt glanced back along the Texas. Ordinarily, on this boat as on the *Fair Maid,* the Texas was deserted, since it was unroofed and frequently covered with soot; the passengers preferred the hurricane deck below.

But tonight as the *Southland* moved away from her berth, there was a man on the Texas. He stood far astern, a Hamletlike figure, his hands clasped behind him.

"Chalfonte. I thought he'd keep to his cabin."

"Would be, if he had any sense," said Max. "There's two men from the downtrip swear they're going to shoot him on sight. He must be standing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there just to dare them. Showing off."

Walt jerked a bellpull, signaling a stop. They were close to the wharf, but he counted on momentum to carry them sufficiently far out for a turn by the time the cam rods had been moved from the reverse to the forward positions, a job which had to be done by hand.

He had started to put the wheel over when the first shot rang out.

"Lynch the cheat! Kill him!"

Walt, crying: "Take it, Max," sprang out on the deck. There was a second shot as he reached Chalfonte's side, and a pistol ball clanged off the plunging high gallows frame. Chalfonte's hands parted, and in the right one as he brought it forward gleamed a bright, snubby derringer.

It was ready for action.

Walt saw what the gambler intended to do. Mad with rage, incapable of distinguishing which men had attacked him, he would have fired directly and blindly into the crowd on the wharf.

Walt grabbed the wrist, forced it low. The derringer exploded.

It had an astonishing kick, throwing both their arms high and nearly toppling them overboard. There was a loud *plop!* in the water halfway between deck and dock; a silvery spearpoint raised itself, then disappeared.

The boat was too far out now for effective shooting. Walt got the derringer as Captain Lander came scurrying up on the Texas.

"What's the trouble?"

Walt shoved the gambler at him.

"Nothing. Only you'd better keep this man locked up in his stateroom, or I'm liable to throw him overboard."

He went back into the glass pilothouse, took the wheel, and rang for full speed ahead.

The *Southland* started down-river.

CHAPTER III

TROUBLED WATERS

WALT NELSON had been piloting on the lower river for six years, including one year as a cub. He held more point-to-point speed records than he cared to count, though Ed Willis, who didn't have a one, had no doubt counted them many times.

Walt had drawn a salary as high as one thousand dollars a month, which shows what a reputation will do. Unlike many pilots, he knew a good deal about the machinery below, and could understand the problems faced by the greasy sweating men who tended it.

He never cursed through a one-way speaking tube and never demanded the impossible, with the result that engineers respected and liked him. When he rang a signal it was instantly obeyed.

Captains virtually turned command of the boat over to him once the landing hawsers had been cast off. He seemed tireless. Erect, without expression, he would steer for hours along a tortuous channel, avoiding sawyers, planters and all manner of snags and sandbars not even visible to the landsman.

Every ripple on the surface had a meaning for him. Every shadow told him something. He used no charts, for there were none to use, but kept the river—the whole twisty deceptive malicious river—neatly folded in his memory, and unwound it bit by bit as needed.

He knew every landmark. Sometimes it seemed as though he must *feel* the position rather than see it; for fog never fazed him; and tales were told of how when once he was awakened from a sound sleep to stand his watch he would say without even a glance out of his stateroom window, "Opposite

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bayou Sara, eh?" or, "Must be just about to round the Hen and Chickens."

But then he didn't seem to sleep much. Even when off duty he was frequently found in the pilot-house, watching the surface for possible new danger signs, noting changes in the ever-changing banks. He lived the river, seldom even going ashore. Only once in those six years had he been away from the St. Louis-New Orleans run for more than a few days; and that was when, his savings in his wallet, he had gone to Cincinnati with his friend Captain George Walsh to help supervise the construction of their own boat, the *Fair Maid*.

That boat—every magnificent inch of her from keel to the iron gingerbread work of her chimneytops—was built according to their own plans and under their own critical eyes. The workmen declared that Captain Walsh and Walt Nelson had their meals in the yard and slept there at night, being unwilling to leave the borning *Fair Maid* for even a minute. Well, she had justified their attention.

She handled as easily as a canoe; she broke speed records effortlessly; and even the most blasé river travelers sucked in breath when they beheld the gilded splendor of her saloons. If you took passage on the *Fair Maid* you were more than comfortable: you were in luxury. If you shipped your freight by the *Fair Maid* you knew it would get to its destination—and get there first.

Could Walt risk a craft like that on the down-river run at night, in low water? The *Southland* of course was different. If Eb Lander wanted to take the chance, that was all right to Walt.

As a matter of fact, the run was ordinarily an easy one, the river being fairly wide and, for the Mississippi, practically straight, while the banks on both sides were marked by woods that were black lines of warning in the darkness.

But running downstream was always more difficult than pushing up, for the current got you and sometimes the boat wouldn't respond to her rudder in time to prevent grounding. Sometimes it was only a matter of a foot or two when the snag, its faint mark on the surface not seen soon enough, might rip the bottom out of a boat.

And then there was Hank Filmer.

THAT boss cutthroat and his gang, growing bolder every day, had boarded many a flatboat and broadhorn along this section—and nobody had ever seen any members of the crews. It was only a matter of time when Hank would feel himself strong enough to tackle a steamboat. Tying up at some lonely landing after the descent of the moon, or anchoring in the shadow of the dark forbidding shore, could be even more dangerous than plunging on through the night.

There was a stir at his shoulder.

"I—I'm sorry I was rude to you this afternoon."

Walt turned his head for only an instant, nodding. Judith Matthewson stood in the door of the pilot house.

He knew about her. She was the only child of a wealthy planter, the loveliest of Louisiana belles. With three slaves and a poor-relation aunt in attendance, she had been visiting cousins in St. Louis.

"Forget it," Walt said mildly.

"You're not angry?" She seemed surprised; she was. Her lightest displeasure had always been treated with awe and trembling.

"Not a bit. Excuse me for not getting you a chair."

"I understand. You've got to stick

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the wheel. Do you mind if I just sit and watch you for a while?" She looked at him with great round eyes.

Walt shrugged. He was cursing under his breath, but not cursing her. He had just seen a flatboat a couple of hundred yards ahead on the silvered surface of the water near the shadow of a point he'd intended to cut. It showed no light, of course. Those damned flatboats, law or no law, usually failed to show a light or even to keep a watch at night, so that you were almost on top of them before you saw them.

He nosed the *Southland* out toward midstream, willing to sacrifice a little distance rather than chance collision. The flatboat might be anchored; he couldn't tell, from this distance.

"I think it's wonderful that you handle a big boat so easily." She was standing directly behind him. He smelled perfume. "Can you forgive me for the way I spoke? You've proved that you aren't afraid to—"

She stopped, having been interrupted not by any noise but by silence. Indeed a noise, even a loud one, would not have been so startling.

The *Southland,* which had been throbbing and shuddering, now was still. Walt glanced back and saw that sparks still swirled in the smoke pouring out of her chimneys, but the gallows frame had ceased to heave.

So that no light should shine on the river ahead, confusing Walt, the forward end of the boiler deck had been hung with canvas and the Texas skylight covered with old blankets. Ghostlike, shrouded in darkness, she drifted through the moon-silvered water.

The current was not strong, but Walt could feel it. The wheel was useless. The boat was making for the point—and for the flatboat there.

"What's the trouble?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Walt, but he could guess.

Captain Lander appeared on the forward main deck. He cupped his hands to his mouth. "Damn' fool centered his engine! Be all right in a minute!"

Walt nodded. He knew he could not expect a crack crew, like the one he was accustomed to on the *Fair Maid.* Still, it seemed odd that this should happen while they were running at an even speed.

The girl had seated herself in the only chair the pilot-house afforded, and was looking not at the river, but at Walt. Pampered, courted, flattered, to her this big, tired, and not too polite pilot was a novelty, almost a fascination. She was even a little frightened of him.

The flatboat, Walt saw, had slipped into the shadow of the point. It was no longer visible. He leaned out of the house, calling down to Lander.

"We're heading for an unlighted flatty. I'm going to make a toot. Have somebody wave a torch."

He said to Judith Matthewson, "Better hold your ears," and pulled the whistle cord three times.

There was no sound. The boat slid silently on.

"Is—is it broken?" She could tell from his sudden, angry tenseness that something was not right. He was worried now.

"It seems to be," Walter muttered.

HE LOOKED below. One of the deckhands, a darky, stood at the foot of a landing stage holding a pole to whose end had been fastened an iron basket filled with resin and pine knots blazing brilliantly. This he waved back and forth. Drops of burning pitch fell to the water with furtive hisses.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another darky appeared beating a broad brass dinner-gong. The sound stretched across the river to be gulped spongily by the shores; but there was no answer from the shadow of the point. Was the flatboat still there?

The darkness toward which they were headed—all the darker in contrast to the moonlight-smeared water edging it—gave no sign.

It was shoal here, too.

Eb Lander, without waiting to be told, had posted leadsmen at the bows, and their weird monotonous chant rose to the pilot-house. "Quarter less mark . . . mark twain . . . quarter less mark . . . *quarter less twain!* . . . mark twain . . ."

Mark held her as much as possible away from the shore, but there was no fighting the current when paddlewheels slapped listlessly without strength.

"Quarter less twain . . . *eight and a half!*"

He was afraid to try to put her any further over. She might swing around broadside to the current and get completely out of control.

The darkness was savagely abrupt: entering it was like plunging into a cloud of thick black smoke. Nothing was visible except where flaming blobs of pitch dripped out of the iron basket, and where, on starboard and larboard, the crimson glow of the furnaces was hurled fanwise across the surface of the river.

Walt saw the flatboat loom, faint but unmistakable. He shouted a warning and spun the wheel. Timbers screeched.

The darky below let the iron basket fall into the water with a loud indignant sizzle, and ran aft, yelling.

A rifle exploded, then another. Walt saw the muzzle-flare of the second one.

He kicked the chair out from under the Matthewson girl; she thudded to the floor! "Oh!" she cried, breathless and indignant.

"Sorry . . . Stay down!"

He knew what was happening. He had suspected it when the engine was so unaccountably centered. Somebody below had sold them out.

There were high shrill screams. One leadsman dove overboard. The other fell on his back when a third rifle spoke.

The *Southland* bumped something, and all up and down her length she shivered convulsively. Things fell off shelves; chairs and tables toppled; the squeal of timbers was deafening.

The boat was aground.

CHAPTER IV

FIGHTING MAN

THERE came a splatter of shots. Two windows of the pilot-house were smashed; glass tinkled through the echoes. Max awoke, and started to sit up, blinking. Walt, bending low, put a hand on his chest and shoved him back.

There were running steps along the main deck, then up on the hurricane deck. There were yells, two or three more shots. Walt heard Eb Lander's voice for an instant. "Damn you! You ain't going to—" A crash swallowed it.

They'd be coming up on the Texas soon.

Walt drew the derringer, Chalfonte's derringer, and cocked it. He heard the girl gasp. He did not tell her that the weapon was empty and that there wasn't a grain of powder or a bit of lead in the pilot-house.

The first pirate to appear was a long rubber-jointed man with a beard that looked as if it had been daubed on with a paintbrush. He held a stubby club in both hands. He started for the pilot-house.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One step nearer," Walt shouted, "and you're dead!"

The pirate must have been drunk. He stood blinking foolishly in the moonlight for a moment, then turned and ran. Before he could reach the after stairway, however, two others had ascended to the Texas. The three stood whispering, glancing toward the pilot-house.

After a while they began edging toward the pilot-house, moving sideways with very small steps.

"Kill them!" the girl whispered fiercely. "Shoot them quick!" Her cheeks were flushed and she was breathing fast.

It occurred to Walt Nelson that they thought he was bluffing. So he was. But the gun he held had a businesslike appearance. "Stay here, stay low," he whispered, and rose, stepping out into the moonlight. "Didn't you hear me? Get off this deck or somebody's going to get a shot in his belly!"

They could see the weapon now. They wavered, then started backward slowly, facing him, ashamed to run but afraid to stay. He stood motionless, the derringer at his hip.

"Where's that pilot? What's the matter with you tarnation water-livered—*Show me that pilot!*"

Hank Filmer came charging up onto the Texas like a whirlwind. There was no mistaking him, for though not many men had seen him and lived, he was described everywhere.

He was enormous, a giant. Copiously bewhiskered, his eyes bright gleams of fire, he stood swaying, feet wide apart, shoulders hunched, as if prepared to lift the whole steamboat. He had long gorillalike arms and huge hands. He had not been born soon enough, and should properly have knocked around with such men as Black Caesar and Blackbeard Teach on water saltier and less muddy than that of the Mississippi. But he made the most of the place and time in which he found himself.

Horse-thief and slave-thief, when outlawed at last, he had haunted the Natchez Trace, occasionally swooping upon lonely farmhouses, waylaying horsemen whom he robbed and killed, afterward cutting them open, filling their bodies with rocks and sinking them.

Recently, prodded by increased ambition, he had formed a gang of river-pirates. He was afraid of nobody. Dozens of men had sworn to kill him—men whose wives he has assaulted, whose homes he had burned. On that wild frontier he lived like a beast of the jungle, for if ever he showed himself in what passed for civilization he would certainly be lynched out of hand. Men respected courage; but Filmer was a mad jungle animal.

Walt said quietly, "Here I am. And if you want to have your insides blown out, just take a step toward me."

Hank had no weapon, but he had no sense either, and no imagination. Besides, he was very drunk. He might not even have seen the derringer.

Laughing, his head thrown back, he started for Walt.

WALT threw the pistol into his face, cutting the left cheek and blood mingled with the coarse matted hairs of the beard. It was like pipping a pebble at a mad bull.

Walt ducked under the great outstretched arms and hooked his left fist, then his right, into the body just beneath the ribs. Hank stood motionless a moment, blinking not so much in pain as in amazement. Walt shot a long hard right to his jaw.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hank teetered on his heels; and this was unbelievable, as if the very earth had shivered, as if a mountain had been pushed back.

Before he could recover himself and reach out again with those mighty arms, fists splattered in his face, blinding him in one eye, causing blood to gush from his nose.

He roared. He lunged forward.

But Walt was not there.

Once caught in those arms, Walt knew, he would be helpless as a kitten. He stepped back, warily watching.

"Stand still and fight, you—"

Walt slipped in, and his left fist smacked the lips, crunched against the teeth. He danced back. His foot struck something—a corner of the skylight? —and it almost cost him his balance. He flapped his arms, staggering, turning. Then they began to hit him from behind.

He had forgotten all about the other pirates. They had clubs. He felt three or four blows, on his shoulders mostly, though one crashed upon his head just over the right ear. Groggy, he saw Hank Filmer charging in once more. He ducked, swinging his fists.

When he caught a flash of Max cannonballing across the deck toward them, he tried to yell for the lad to keep off.

He did not remember being knocked down, but he remembered lying on the deck and trying to cover hs head with his arms.

A vast bellowing blackness swarmed over him.

IT TOOK three hours, with the use of poles, windlasses and kedge anchors, to dislodge the *Southland* from the mudbank on to which she had drifted, but Walt Nelson had no part in this work. He learned about it later, when a bruised and anxious Max brought him back to consciousness.

"Are you all right, Mr. Nelson?"

"No." Walt swallowed. It hurt even to do that, Everything hurt. "No, but I seem to be alive. Did they beat you up much?"

"Not much. They worked on you, mostly. I was afraid they'd kill you."

There had been but forty-two persons on the *Southland,* passengers and crew, Max told him, and five, all negroes, were killed outright. Seven others, two of them darkies, one Captain Eb Lander, had been so badly wounded that they either were dying or had already died. Both the white women, Judith Matthewson and her aunt, were safe.

"That Matthewson gal was screaming for you, when they hauled her ashore," Max reported, grinning, "but you couldn't hear her."

"What happened to Chalfonte?"

"Surrendered tame as a rabbit. They took his rings and his stud and watch and all the money he'd cheated out of them suckers on the *Fair Maid,* but he didn't squawk once."

Walt sat up. He put his elbows on his knees, his head between his hands, and waited for the world to stop rocking. Presently he looked around.

They were in the middle of a clearing, in front of a large square once-white house. Though the sky was streaked with hints of dawn, three fires burned, tinting the house a lambent uncertain pink. It was not an old house, but it had fallen upon evil days.

Originally neo-classic, with tall fluted pillars, it sagged everywhere, and the paint was peeling from it. Few of its windows remained intact. Wild grape vines gripped the railings, and weeds and grass grew through cracks in the veranda.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was two stories high; but on top, as though by afterthought, had been placed a not-at-all classical, glass-enclosed tower, not unlike the pilot-house of a steamboat. A river pirate who balanced a telescope on his knees, sat there now.

"The Olmstead mansion," Walt muttered. "I've sighted on that tower many a time. We must be right behind Calliope Island."

"We are. And they're waiting for something, I don't know what."

One side of the clearing was Calliope Creek, which was in fact not a creek at all but a hooked arm of the Mississippi thrown affectionately around Calliope Island, a small indefinite blob of darkness blocking the river itself from sight. In this creek, battered but still afloat, smoke lifting negligently from its chimneys, was the *Southland,* anchored fore and aft.

Along the shore, and back among the shadows at the clearing's edge, stood Hank Filmer's men. They leaned against trees, most of them wearily chewing tobacco; but each held a rifle, and their eyes, though half closed, were sharp. Other pirates—there must have been thirty in the gang—squatted on their hams around one of the fires in the midst of a litter of jewelry, cash and leather wallets.

They were drinking whisky and talking, and every now and then one would glance up at the man in the tower.

The prisoners stood or sat between the fires and the house. They were cold, shivering. Not a few showed bruises or cuts on which the blood had dried, and all were splattered with mud. Eb Lander lay near the edge of this group, not far from Walt, who rose and went to him.

The captain's eyes were closed, his mouth was open. Walt shook him, chafed his wrists, felt over his heart.

"I—I guess he's dead," whispered Max, scared.

"I guess he is," Walt muttered. "And all because that damn'—"

He walked slowly to where the engineer sat, his back to the fire, hugging his knees. Walt, hands on hips, stood before him.

"You're going to have a lot of explaining to do, if we ever get out of this alive."

The engineer looked up. He was a greasy lumpy man, very large, with black hair that hung almost to his eyes.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mighty funny thing that an engine should be centered when we hadn't changed speed in more than an hour—and it happens right opposite Calliope Island here. The starboard engine too, on your watch. And how does it happen that the whistle cord was cut somewhere between here and Vicksburg? It worked when we left."

The engineer stood up. Others near him stood up. Hank Filmer and his lieutenants looked over from the big fire.

"Listen here, are you accusing me of centering that engine on purpose?"

"I'm not accusing you of anything. Only I'm warning you that you'll have to answer a lot of questions when we get out of this place—if we ever do."

"No man's going to—"

HE PUNCHED Walt in the chest, then on the cheek. Walt, his heels flat on the ground, easily moved his chin away from a third swing. He slipped in close, lifting his left. It went *clunk!* against bone, and the engineer crumpled like a rag doll.

There were shouts of approval from the pirates, from some of the passengers too, including even the engine-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

room hands, for the engineer was not popular. Walt started to walk away. Hank Filmer stopped him.

"Fightin' cock, eh? Fight, fight, fight! You love it, eh?"

Walt made no answer. Filmer was drunk—he held a jug of whisky in his hand—but he seemed in excellent humor. He seemed, too, to hold nothing against Walt. There was dried blood in his beard, and his lips were swollen, his left eye discolored, but all this appeared to make no difference to him. If anything, his manner toward Walt was one of amused and tolerant affection.

"Just can't get enough of it, eh? Well, we'll give you some fightin'! Help pass the time away!"

He lurched back toward the center of the clearing.

"Hey! One of you boys step out here and tackle the pilot-house gamecock! The Terror of the Texas Deck! He's got a couple of cyclones for fists, and when he grinds his teeth they's sparks! He's the scrappin'est fool ever scrapped! Fifty dollars extry from the pot for the man that knocks the Pilot-house Whirlwind out!"

Nobody moved. They had seen Walt in action and were satisfied to let things stay as they were.

But Hank craved excitement. He went here and there, waving the jug. "What's the matter with you? Fine passel of angleworms! You ain't going to force me to pull him to pieces myself, are you?"

Smoke from the dying fires hung low, and Hank disturbed it, causing it to swirl, as he charged back and forth. Overhead, the sky lightened.

"Come on, come on! A *hundred* dollars to the boy that finishes off the Pilot-house Tornado, no holds barred! Have I got to—"

One of the remoter sentries came forward, yelling. He was preceded by a tall thick-shouldered stranger. The stranger had a rifle cradled in his right arm, muzzle low, and there was a bowie knife at his belt. His clothes were good, though they'd been torn by brambles; and his boots were slimy with mud.

He had a hard glossy gray face, like polished granite, and his eyes, cold as ice, were blue and disconcertingly steady.

The sentry, behind him, had him covered with a rifle, but the stranger paid no attention to this. He walked slowly to the center of the clearing and only stopped when he was face to face with Filmer.

"Found him sneaking through the woods back there, Hank! I got a bead on him afore he could bring his gun up!"

The boss pirate's great head jutted forward until his face was close to that of the stranger. "What you doing here?"

The stranger answered coolly, "Looking for Hank Filmer."

"Well, I'm Hank Filmer. What you want?"

The stranger studied him a moment, nodding. "So you're Filmer, eh? Well, maybe you could use an assistant out here?"

The chief's admiration for him, it was obvious, increased with each moment. The stranger was respectful in tone but he refused to quaver before Hank's most ferocious scowl.

"Who are you?"

"Eh? Well, I got so many names I sometimes forget which was the one I started with. But that ain't the point. The point is, I killed a man in Natchez-under-the-Hill last week. The Vigilantes got mumbling as to how they'd ought to string me up, so I skedaddled.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, there ain't no other town along here I'd be likely to be welcome in, so I thought to myself I'd come out and see if Hank Filmer wasn't maybe interested. From all I hear, you ain't a man that asks too many questions."

Hank was flattered. He took a pull at the jug, perhaps in order to hide what might have been something like a blush; but his tiny eyes, piglike in the folds of that great bleary face, glittered with suspicion.

"Them Vigilantes wouldn't come here after you?"

"No chance. They're scared of you."

Hank nodded. "They damn' well ought to be!" He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "So you think you'd like to play with me and the boys, eh? We're a kind of rough lot sometimes, mister."

Hank thought of something. His little eyes twinkled, and he glanced toward Walt Nelson. "We could give you maybe a tryout, mister, if you're rarin' to show how rough you are. We could give you a kind of tryout, and if you came through all right we could maybe cut you in on something pretty, right away, right this morning."

The stranger said nothing.

"See that pilot-man over there?" Hank nodded toward Walt. "Me and the boys'd kind of like to see you tackle him."

The stranger looked at Walt, and his eyes were cold with contempt. "Him?"

"Yeah, him."

"All right," said the stranger, and put down his rifle.

CHAPTER V

GAMECOCK'S CHICK

FILMER guffawed his delight, the pirates edged in from every side, and even the prisoners gathered closer. After all, there was nothing like a fight.

The behavior of the stranger, too, held promise. Without a sound, without another glance at Walt, he took off coat, shirt and undershirt, and stood stripped to the waist. There wasn't an ounce of fat on him. His muscles, when he moved, rippled back and forth with satiny suppleness. He took off his boots.

"Catch-as-catch-can," Hank Filmer roared. "Hit, kick, twist or gouge anything you can reach, eh? Come on, pilot. Ain't you going to shed your coat?"

Walt stood motionless.

"I'm not fighting," he announced.

This was greeted with yells and catcalls. The pirates were in no mood to be cheated of their fun.

"What's the matter? Scared?"

"I'm no professional pugilist. I'll fight when I have to, but I'm not putting on any exhibition to help pass the time away for you."

Again the hoots of derision, the catcalls. The stranger strode over to Walt. Was that a hint of expression in his eyes, for an instant there, as they reflected the dying light of the campfires, the growing light of the sky? Or had Walt been mistaken?

The stranger's face was as stiff with contempt as though the features were congealed into position by some invisible paste.

He leaned very close to Walt. "Afraid, eh?" he said aloud. Then in a swift and not sibilant whisper, "Fight with me. I want a chance to talk to you."

It was so low and so quickly spoken that nobody but Walt could possibly have heard it. And the man's lips had not moved. He strode away, shrugging.

"He's afraid."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Walt looked around, seeing nothing to clear his confusion. Who was this man? Where had he come from and what was he doing here? But after all, Walt had nothing to lose—now.

"Afraid, hell! I'll fight you!" he shouted.

They screamed with joy then, gathering closer. Walt, with Max helping him, took off his coat and shirt; he took off his shoes.

"Watch smart, Max," he whispered. "There's something funny going on. I don't know what it is, yet, but watch smart and use your brains."

"Beat the tar out of him," urged Max.

Walt washed his mouth and gargled with whisky. In the middle of the clearing he took a stance a few feet from the stranger, left foot forward, elbows in, fists raised, the palms toward him, the knuckles out.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Walt was staring into that cold gray face. There was absolutely no expression in it now.

The stranger nodded.

Walt nodded.

"All right, *go!* And the devil take the loser!"

WALT had known from the stranger's position, which was similar to his own, that here was a man who could defend himself. Because of the stranger's words, however, Walt had not expected an immediate attack.

He was surprised.

A left reached his cheek, cutting it. A right slipped past one of his elbows, which only partly deflected it, and stung his ear.

He jumped backward, but the stranger kept after him. Dazed for a moment, Walt closed in, locking the stranger's arms.

"So that's your trick, eh?" he grunted as they staggered across the clearing. He held on, despite the battering his head received from the man's left shoulder. "Say you want to talk to me, and then—"

"Listen, keep fighting. There's a posse near here, they're out to lynch Filmer—"

Walt stumbled, and it broke his grip.

The pirates cheered as he backed away again, the stranger stepping in swiftly, swinging rights and lefts, most of which Walt was able to block.

All the while the stranger was talking. He scowled a little, and the onlookers, if they noticed that his lips moved, no doubt supposed he was cursing Walt under his breath.

"I was sent ahead to make sure they were here. . . . Just going to turn back when one of 'em spotted me . . . Nothing I could do but try a bluff."

He swung too high. Walt, bending his knees, lowered his guard and smashed a right and left, hard blows, into the belly. They must have hurt.

The stranger's face went pale, and he closed in, throwing his arms around Walt, but he kept talking.

"They're getting together at Mallison's Plantation, three miles from here. If I'm not back soon they'll come anyway. . . . "

"That," gasped Walt as they fell to the ground, "would be fine."

"Don't you understand!" They rolled, working toward the edge of Calliope Creek. All around them were yelling faces, waving arms. "These men are out for blood. They don't know anything about you and the others here. They'll shoot first and won't ask questions."

The stranger broke loose, started to get to his feet. Walt, flat on his back, kicked him in the hip and he went down

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again. Walt sprang upon him. The cheers were deafening.

"One of us's got to get there and warn them. They'll kill everybody here. . . ."

"When we touch the water," Walt whispered.

"Right."

Hands were scrabbling for Walt's throat. He brought his chin down. He was on top, and had a knee on the man's great heaving chest. His right arm was free. He swung punch after punch at the man, to the delight of the spectators who thought he was punching the face. As a matter of fact, his fist smacked only the neck.

The stranger with a terrific effort pushed Walt off. Walt, rolling, pulled the stranger right over him. There was a muddy splash. Their threshing legs had struck the water.

"Now!"

They released one another, scrambled to their feet, and without straightening, plunged headlong into the creek.

THE SAME thought had occurred to each. The only possible protection near at hand was the *Southland.* By getting behind it, and so out of sight for a moment, they could easily reach Calliope Island where the thicket was dense.

Recrossing the winding, narrow Calliope Creek should not be difficult; the pirates probably would not think fast enough to cover the creek and so pen them on the island, to be hunted down and killed at leisure.

Walt dove, swimming with the current.

The fight had winded him, and he could not stay under water long. When his head came up again he found a surface twitchy with splashings.

One ball struck not two inches from his face, spurting water into his eyes. The spat of rifles behind him seemed faint and very far away, but he knew that this was not so and that it only seemed so because his hearing had been dulled by punches and submersion.

He took a tremendous gulp of air, and dove again.

This time he had actually touched the *Southland's* hull with a hand before he rose. Yes, he was protected now—at least, until they ran far enough along the shore of the mainland, one way or the other, to catch sight of him.

He swam hard for Calliope Island.

They saw him again just before he reached the shore, and rifles cracked. But the distance was greater now, and the light, that uncertain shadow-shifting light of early dawn, was the worst possible for marksmanship.

He felt mud under him, and lurched for the bushes. Bullets were clipping them, tittering and spitting among them. Walt, glancing over his shoulder just before he sprang into cover, glimpsed the stranger, or what remained of him—and knew that if anybody reached that posse alive it would have to be himself.

Five or six of the pirates, knee-deep in water, had captured the stranger, presumably stopped by a rifle ball. One was holding him by the hair. They were beating him.

They were wild with rage, which they took out on what was almost certainly a corpse by this time. One man unsheathed a bowie knife and slashed and hacked the stranger's neck.

THE ONLY person prepared for the break—obedient, he had been prepared for anything—was Max. He knew that there must be some reason for it. Mr. Nelson wouldn't simply desert them.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He saw the stranger shot down as he struck water, his spine broken by a bullet. He saw his hero go under, saw the head come up again.

There was one pirate whose rifle was in position and whose brain was not befogged by liquor. He raised that rifle. Max, screaming, threw himself sideways against the man—and they fell together.

Max got to his knees, grabbed another man around the legs. Somebody kicked his head, and he fell. Somebody kicked him again and again, while he tried to protect his head with his arms. But he didn't care, now.

He had seen Mr. Nelson dive the second time.

Half an hour later, when the last of the pirates had returned to the clearing, cursing, sweating, scratched and torn by brambles, Max, though his head sang, was able to smile. Of course they hadn't caught Mr. Nelson! He was too smart for them!

"You!" Hank Filmer, his good humor gone, charged upon one of the creek shore sentries. "You was nearest! Why didn't you get him!"

"I would have, Hank! I practically had a bead on him—and then this yellow-haired youngster here slammed against me!"

They all looked at Max. Hank Filmer walked over to where he sat.

"He grabbed my legs," another man said. "I was just going to shoot."

Hank Filmer very slowly drew a knife from his belt. Without looking at it, without taking his gaze from Max, he felt its edge with a dirty thumb.

"The gamecock's chick, eh? Well, we'll fix him right now."

He leaned over, the knife raised. Max cowered back, but a pirate, stooping, pinioned his arms from behind and lifted his chin so that his throat was exposed.

"Here she comes!"

They all looked up, even Max, who was released. The man in the tower of the Olmstead house was waving his telescope.

"She's coming round the bend!"

CHAPTER VI

FAIR MAID IN DISTRESS

AFTER the Filmer gang had gone, the clearing was very quiet. The fires had died, and the four pirates who remained to guard the prisoners stood watchful, apart, their rifles ready, while the man in the tower gazed through his telescope.

Judith Matthewson and her aunt were no longer there. They had been yanked to their feet by Hank Filmer himself when the man in the tower gave the alarm. They had screamed and struggled, but they had been dragged away.

"The rest of you stay here!" Filmer shouted. And to the sentries: "Blast down the first one that moves!"

Another prisoner was missing. The black-haired engineer had slipped away with Filmer and his men, along the shore of the creek.

"That pilot must have been right," somebody whispered. "The engineer was working in with them."

"Mr. Nelson's always right," declared Max.

"You and your Mr. Nelson; I notice he skipped away as soon as he got a chance! He didn't wait to protect the women folks."

Max started to get to his feet. "Are you trying to tell me that Mr. Nelson—"

"Sit down," said a guard.

Max sat down. "He'll be back," he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

muttered. "You wait—he'll be back."

Somebody else said, "I'd certainly like to believe that. I'd like to see him back right now, and about fifty men with him. But there ain't a chance. He got out while the getting out was good."

"He'll be back! You'll see him!"

"Yeah!"

Max had opened his mouth to protest again, when the first shot sounded. One of the guards turned completely around and fell on his face.

Through the echoes of that first shot came a dozen others. The woods back of the Olmstead mansion clattered and flared with rifle fire.

The remaining guards never had a chance. They never knew, even, from which direction death came. They were knocked down like so many sticks of wood.

One struggled to his elbow, tried to reach his gun. Five or six more shots rang out, all together, like one mighty explosion, and as the man collapsed the whole top of his head seemed to disappear.

Thereafter, for a moment, nothing stirred in the clearing.

Walt Nelson came walking out of the forest. He was cramming a ball into a horse pistol already smoking at the muzzle.

"Where are the rest of them? What happened to—"

Max yelled, "There's one in the tower!"

The shot sounded like a couple of boards clapped together. Walt felt something hit the top of his left shoulder. It seemed to push against him, causing him to take a backward step. He dropped to one knee, raising the pistol.

He took deliberate aim—and fired.

The man in the tower went limp. His rifle slipped out of his hands, slid down the roof, clanged on the steps of the veranda. He simply lay over the sill of the window he had been leaning out of, and he remained that way, head down, arms dangling.

Other men were coming out of the forest. Not one or two, but dozens of them.

They were armed, and they were angry. Planters, most of them, or overseers, though there were also some hands from a flatboat which had put in at Mallison's Landing while the posse was being formed. They had no compunction, these men, about killing from cover. Why should they?

When you're dealing with a ferocious beast like Hank Filmer, you are not likely to go in for niceties of conduct. Warning? Hank had never given anybody warning.

Moreover, they had seen their scout, the man with whom Walt faked the fight, lying face down in the shallows, his body horribly mangled. They had liked that man. He had been their friend, one of them, one of the best.

Some, seeing Walt, after a few hasty words with Max, run for the house, yelled after him: "Don't go in there! Might be some more, hiding!"

WALT paid no attention. He dashed through the sagging doorway, up rickety broken-bannistered stairs, down a hall the boards of which were rotten and crumbly under his feet. He climbed a ladder—and emerged into the tower.

The man he had shot lay half in and half out of the window. His legs were spread wide. He did not move.

From here it was possible to see over the woods of Calliope Island to the great wide yellow rolling river. The telescope was on the floor, but Walt

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

did not need it. He knew that steamboat booming down the channel. He knew every inch of her.

The *Fair Maid* was white and brave in the early sun, which glistened on the gilded fretwork between her stacks and fleered across the great colored portraits on the paddleboxes. Proud and easy-riding she was, a thoroughbred, and the river coiled away from her bows in long turgid streamers.

Walt knew, too, the instant he saw the flatboat, what it was Hank Filmer planned to do. That engineer again! He had told Filmer about the *Fair Maid,* and Filmer, not satisfied with a miserable craft like the *Southland,* was reaching for the finest packet on the river.

The flatboat was close to midchannel, cutting right across the *Fair Maid's* bows.

Walt Nelson could see that she was crowded, but this fact was not evident from the *Fair Maid,* for most of Hank Filmer's men, their rifles cocked, their knives unsheathed, crouched behind piles of lumber. The only passengers of the flatboat who would be visible from the *Fair Maid* were the black-haired engineer and Judith Matthewson and her aunt, their white flouncy dresses spattered with mud and torn in many places. All three waved wildly, the women no doubt having been commanded to do so with rifles aimed at their backs.

Columns of steam rose from the *Fair Maid's* 'scape pipes. She was slowing down.

George Walsh, the captain, and the second pilot Ed Willis, in Walt's own pilot-house, would have seen the women and the engineer, and probably recognized them. They must have concluded that the *Southland* had been snagged or run aground behind Calliope Island. They would certainly not suppose that she had been taken by pirates who now in board daylight were about to take the *Fair Maid* itself.

The *Fair Maid* went slower and slower. Men with ropes were at the landing stages, ready to throw lines.

Walt leaned out of the tower window waving his arms *"No! No! Keep away!"*

But of course they couldn't hear him, at that distance. And if they saw his signal it would probably only confirm their assumption that there had been a wreck and that they should stop and offer help.

Besides, waving or no waving, it was too late now anyway.

The lines were cast, the flatboat pulled alongside the drifting *Fair Maid.* And even as Walt watched, the pirates sprang out from behind the piles of lumber. No, he certainly didn't need that telescope on the floor. He could see it all too clearly.

Black figures swarmed up onto the *Fair Maid's* main deck, up to the hurricane deck. There was a tussle forward, when some of the hands resisted, but it did not last long.

Five or six shots were fired—Walt could hear them as faint faroff pips—and a group of pirates raced across the Texas and into the pilot-house.

ALREADY, out of sight in the cabins, they would have started to strip that beautiful boat of her finery, her expensive rugs, her oil paintings, her polished lovely furniture. They would be smashing their way into her staterooms, wrecking her saloon.

He saw them haul aboard the women who might still be useful as decoys. The engineer didn't need any help. The flatboat, empty now except for the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lumber, and forgotten, wheeled crazily downriver.

Somebody behind Walt whispered, "We'll never get 'em now."

He turned. The tower room was full of men. Bearded, hard-mouthed, their eyes bloodshot, their fingers toying with the triggers of guns, they stood watching Hank Filmer get away.

The *Fair Maid* was moving again. She passed the flatboat, heading downriver. They could run her aground practically anywhere—no doubt they'd already picked a place—and strip her, leaving a wreck.

Walt pointed out of another window.

"There's the *Southland*. Her fires are still lighted, and her second engineer's down there. Come on!"

"But you'd never catch—"

"I'll catch them, damn it! Come on!"

CHAPTER VII

TAKE THE WHEEL

THEY were going full speed when they rounded the first down-river bend and caught sight again of the *Fair Maid,* a dainty white speck on the ochre-colored river. This was a long open stretch, wide and without islands.

Max had been right when he said that the *Southland,* speeding, sounded like a sick woman. She sounded hysterical. Her bearings clacked in loud confusion, her gallows frame clanged and rattled, the paddles in her paddle-boxes wildly thrashed the water.

All the same, she went fast. They made her go fast.

"I reckon we're gaining a little," said Harris.

He was the unofficial leader of the posse, and had the telescope fixed to his right eye. In the pilot-house with him, and with Walt and Max, were five others, each of whom, like Harris, had sworn to see Hank Filmer dead before the next setting of the sun.

The others were scattered along the boiler deck below, having been ordered not to crowd forward and so perhaps put the boat off balance and slow her a bit.

They looked to their priming, or slowly sharpened knives already razor-edged. Some, like the men in the pilot-house, simply stared ahead. Some helped to drag up fuel or to fire the furnaces.

They were all white men, and except for the mate, the second engineer and the second engineer's cub, they were all members of the posse. Deck-hands and firemen, together with all passengers, including Chalfonte, had been left on Calliope Island. The *Southland* was traveling light.

Walt moved only his hands on the wheel. Except for them, he might have been a statue.

Not until the mate came up on the Texas did he speak, and even then he didn't turn his head or deflect for the smallest fraction of an instant the steady gaze he kept on the river.

"How much does this boat drew?"

"The way she is now, not more'n five and a half."

Walt nodded. "Set some of the boys to swinging lead. We're going to shoot the cutoff behind Blue Nose."

"Good God! in *this* water!"

Harris looked away from the telescope for a moment when Walt did not answer.

"You heard what the pilot said."

They had been seen and recognized from the *Fair Maid* now. Those in the pilot-house, even those without Harris's advantage of a telescope, could see a great running-around on the larger boat. She picked up speed and disappeared around a bend.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The *Southland*, hugging the eastern shore, had the river to herself. Walt watched that shore carefully. Just ahead was Blue Nose, the point around which the *Fair Maid* had vanished. Behind Blue Nose the impatient river had some years ago pushed a way, making the Nose really an island instead of a point—at certain times. This route, this cutoff, which led through thick woods, was only under water part of the time and considered navigable for shallow-draft boats only a few months each year.

It would surely be strewn with hidden snags.

"There it is," muttered Walt, and spun the wheel.

The entrance was so narrow and dark, so slight a break in the forested clay-banked shore, that for a few minutes he was the only one to see it. To the others it was as though Walt were steering straight into an unbroken shore.

The lead was plopping now, the leadsman chanting.

" . . . quarter less mark . . . quarter less mark . . ."

"The least you can do," the mate fussed, "is to send the yawl ahead to take soundings"

"You shut up," said Harris. "This pilot knows his business."

SUDDENLY they were out of the sunlight and into the forest. Walt signaled for half speed, and the *Southland* vibrated with less violence. The men behind him were silent, their muscles taut.

Walt himself had never before been through the Nose cutoff, but he had talked with one of the few pilots who had. He knew that it was narrow and winding and never deep, and that the shallowest water was at the downriver end where the cutoff was dissipated into the main river by way of a canebrake.

If they got past that point they would have saved at least four miles.

Trees leaned out of the orange-red banks on either side, and vines and creepers dangled from them. The leaves sometimes actually brushed the paddleboxes, the passage was so narrow.

A hulking man-made steamboat was monstrously out of place in this wilderness. From her they could sometimes catch the glint of the eyes of wild animals, watching them in amazement—though Walt himself never took his gaze from the water just ahead.

" . . . six and half . . . six and a half . . . quarter less twain . . ."

He signaled for quarter speed. Then, as they neared the edge of the canebrake, he spoke into the speaking tube.

"Cut 'em off!"

Silence rushed in as though to crush them. There was only the chant of the leadsmen and the eerie shush of water at the bows.

" . . . six feet . . . . six and a half . . . six feet . . . *five and a half!"*

A shudder ran through the boat. She had touched. For an instant she seemed to hang as though in midair, teetering.

Walt snatched the speaking tube. "All right! *Give her everything you've got!"*

There was a thin agonized squeal of timbers, and then this sound was drowned in the renewed clang and clatter of the engines. The gallows frame began again to plunge. The paddlewheels rattled furiously.

They were free of the bottom, and shooting forward as though they'd been given a stupendous push.

Five minutes later, going full speed,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they burst into the open river again—and a cheer went up as they found themselves not more than a half mile behind the *Fair Maid*.

Aboard that boat now there was consternation. The pirates had been about to ground her, but now they did not dare. They were outnumbered, and knew it. The day they had long feared, the day when an outraged countryside would rise in vengeance against them, was long overdue—and now it had arrived.

For three hours there was little change in the relative positions of the boats. The *Fair Maid* gained slightly on the straightaways, but Walt made this up by taking advantage of the *Southland's* slightly shallower draft and cutting closer to shore at the bends. The *Southland* began slowly to gain.

They boomed gloriously past Natchez, where up on the bluff and below along the riverfront, men and women, excited by the race, waved wildly. The *Fair Maid* had picked up a little.

"Take the wheel, Max."

Walt stalked out on the Texas, which men were sluicing constantly with river water drawn up in canvas buckets, to keep it from catching fire from the sparks which flew madly out of the stacks. He looked aloft, frowning. The safety-valve below lifted, and excess steam hissed through the 'scape pipe. That would never do. He went below.

MEN naked to the waist, bright with glittering sweat, ruddy in the glare of the furnaces, toiled unpausingly. The place smelled of scalded oil. The noise was terrific.

"You're wasting steam!" Walt shouted to the second engineer. "Can't you make her hold a little more pressure somehow?"

The second engineer was a lank lugubrious man. He spat into the box of sawdust, casting his eyes sideways at the safety-valve arm.

"Weight's on the last notch now, mister, but she lifts it."

"Then rig a line to the arm and tie it down!"

He knew what that meant, and the second engineer knew it too. The *Southland's* old boilers had never been built to withstand such a strain. Yet they might. Who could tell?

The second engineer nodded sadly. "It'll probably blow us to Kingdom Come, but if you don't give a cuss I don't guess I do either." He turned to his cub. "Rig that line, son. I'll keep her bearings cool."

No more steam escaped after that, and Walt went back to the pilot-house. He knew that the old boat might go to pieces at any moment.

It was a matter almost of countable inches now, and the men in the pilot-house, when Walt took over the wheel again, were excited.

"They're arguing with the pilot there ahead," reported Harris, his eye still at the telescope. "There's a big man clipping him a crack with a club every now and then, across the legs. Must be Hank Filmer himself. And' one of them's got a pistol at his head."

Poor Ed Willis! He couldn't be thinking now about the records he'd like to break!

There was a puff of white smoke at the *Fair Maid's* stern, the crack of a shot, and somewhere below, somewhere on the hurricane deck, glass crashed and a man screamed.

Several of the men in the *Southland's* pilot house, who for some time had been impatiently fingering their firearms, raised them at this first shot; but Harris spoke sharply.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not here! Go below for that! If they start shootin' back at us here they might kill the pilot, and without this pilot we ain't going to get Hank!"

The men scampered below. But the precaution was useless.

Regardless of answering shots, it was upon the pilot-house of the *Southland* that the pirates concentrated their fire. Five or six of them in carefully chosen positions tried deliberately, again and again, to get Walt Nelson.

The sunlight on the glass of the house made sighting difficult, and both boats vibrated under the strain of speed, but some of these men were good marksmen.

Ping! A pane of glass ceased to be, tinkling in fragments to the floor, and something touched Walt's left sleeve. He glanced down: there was a hole in the sleeve.

Ping! ping! That one went clear through, smashing two panes. *Ping!* That one clipped splinters from a spoke of the wheel and thunked into the door jamb behind. "Ping!"

"Get down! You'll be killed!" yelled Max.

"Get down yourself, you fool! Somebody's got to hold the wheel!"

Ping . . . ping . . . ping . . .

Flying bits of glass cut Walt's face, but he did not move. White puffs of smoke kept appearing along the *Fair Maid's* afterdeck, like popcorn over a hot fire.

PANIC hit the pirates. That pilot standing there motionless, seeming not even to heed their shots, filled them suddenly with terror. One moment they were shouting defiance, urging the engineer to greater speed; the next moment they were scattered in madness.

It was inexplicable, as these things always are. The panic seemed to strike every part of the *Fair Maid* at the same moment.

Men jumped overboard, at first one three or four, then dozens of them. It was almost suicide, with the racing paddlewheels so close behind.

Man after man was caught and cut to pieces in those paddlewheels. The shooting stopped. A few of the pirates even threw their rifles into the river, holding up their empty hands.

Hank Filmer himself plunged in and out among them, fired at repeatedly and repeatedly hit, but somehow still alive and terrible. They could hear his bellow even over the noise of the engines. When the boats grated together he sprang from one to the other, a one-man boarding party, but he was not followed. A dozen rifles spoke, and he sprawled on the *Southland's* deck.

The boatsides screamed hideously. Walt signaled for quarter speed, and steam shrieked through the 'scape pipes. The race was ended. Below, he saw men of the posse tumbling aboard the *Fair Maid*.

Walt's knees wobbled.

"Take—take the wheel," he whispered to Max.

THEY told about it often afterwards, about how he came to lying on the *Southland's* Texas where he'd been carried, flat on his back and stinking of disinfectant, and about how without ever looking at anything but the sky he said in a voice of wonder, "Why, we got all the way to Baton Rouge! I didn't realize we'd come that far!"

He rolled his eyes, and saw Max, who was holding whisky.

"This *is* Baton Rouge, ain't it?"

The boy nodded, swallowing, so happy to see Mr. Nelson conscious

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again that he did not trust himself to speak.

A doctor was on the other side, and next to the doctor was Captain George Walsh.

"Busted every pane of glass in the whole pilot-house, and never hit you once with lead," Walsh was saying. "Max says you got that shoulder wound back at Calliope. You must lead a charmed life! You got rid of a powerful lot of blood, Walt. They cut you pretty bad with all that flying glass, but never a ball touched you. Every single solitary pane of—"

"Never mind about the *Southland*. What about the *Fair Maid?*"

"Oh, she's all right. Chipped a bit, but nothing serious. They never had a chance to wreck her. You were on our heels so soon."

Walt closed his eyes, smiling. He opened them again when he heard Ed Willis's voice. The older pilot was as excited as any youngster.

"Clipped twenty-eight minutes from the record from Vicksburg to the Baton Rouge city line! Had to have you chasing me to make me do it, Walt, but by dang I did do it! When they—"

Judith Matthewson broke through the group and threw herself on her knees, kissing Walt Nelson.

"You did it for me, I know you did! In spite of the way I treated you, in spite of the fact that you were returning me to my own fiancé, you risked your life to save me! Didn't you?"

He started to say something, then nodded, swallowing.

"But you belong to another," he whispered in a hollow voice. "Go!"

She rose, her arms across her face. "And I called you a coward," she sobbed as she ran away.

There was an embarrassed silence. Nobody wanted to look at Walt Nelson, who only hitched himself into a more comfortable position and fumbled for a cheroot.

"If she tries to come aboard again, don't let her."

They gasped, turning to him. "But you—"

"Why, Walt, you just said—"

"Sure I said that. Had to get rid of her somehow, didn't I? Course what I was really taking all those risks for was to protect my investment in the *Fair Maid*. You all know that as well as I do."

His eye caught that of Ed Willis, and he grinned.

"So you broke a record at last? Good old Ed! I reckon there ain't any question about which is the greatest boat on the river now, eh? *Two* lightning pilots!"

THE END

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. ADV.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Red Sea Jonah

By
E. HOFFMANN
PRICE
Author of "Message for McTavish," "Allah Sends a Reaper," etc.

The followers of Allah are skeptics, and to them calling the big blond trader "Lucky" Knudsen challenged him to prove his good fortune. So this he had to do, against a wily pirate and a Red Sea squall—with, for good measure, a living jinx around his neck

LATE afternoon light slanted across the shell-strewn courtyard, and made a flame of the rug on which Lucky Knudsen and Ayyub sat. There was no sound but the *glub-glub-glub* of the water pipe whose stem the old Arab had coiled about his lean wrist. Finally, Nureddin Ayyub ceased stroking his beard and clapped his hands.

A barefooted Somali giant came in. *"Qahwat!"* the master ordered, and the servant answered, *"Qahwat,* by Allah!"

Knudsen's rugged face and broad mouth were placid as the sharp features of the leathery Arab. He drew up his pipe, and seemed concerned with nothing but its gurgling; but he was thinking, "First the coffee, then the bad news."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Men would henceforth have less confidence in him when they learned that Nureddin Ayyub had refused to take him, a trusted friend, into partnership. The old man's only son had been lost in a Red Sea squall, and he needed someone young and as rugged as Knudsen to handle his trading posts and the freighting cargoes from Africa to Arabia.

But something was wrong.

"You are a second son, taking the place of my first," Nureddin finally said, when the coffee steamed in little cups the size of thimbles, foaming, thick, and spiced with cardamon. "You are honest. You have no fear."

Knudsen recognized this as the buildup to a refusal. His eyes, frosty beneath sun bleached brows, betrayed him when face and voice would not. He said, *"Astagfir 'ullah,"* the conventional response to a high compliment; "I take refuge with Allah," implying that the speaker begged protection against the evil eye. This has been the customary phrase for nearly fourteen hundred years, and nothing ever changes on the Red Sea.

Nureddin Ayyub's sombre eyes brightened. He raised a lean hand to emphasize what he had to say. "It is just that, my son. Sa'oud or Sa'id—" He made a play on two names that mean *fortunate*. "The eyes of all the Red Sea people are on your luck. And is it not written, *'I betake me to the Lord of the Daybreak for refuge from Satan, and from the envy of the envier when he envieth'?"*

Knudsen's straw-colored mustaches twisted a little as his teeth set. Then he shrugged and said, "Verily, that is written."

The old man sighed. "For that reason, I cannot make you my partner. To be famed for luck is dangerous. No man knows yet whether your fortune is strong enough to overcome the disasters that dog a man who is envied; or you must prove its strength."

THAT settled it. The best business connection on the whole Red Sea Coast, lost because of a name won in honest trading, pearling, freighting.

"Lucky" Knudsen, indeed . . . Knudsen drank his coffee, exchanged compliments, and stepped out into the red glare that reached from Africa to Djumelay Island.

There was no arguing with these people, they gauged a man by the thing offered as his measure. If he was called strong, his strength must be exceptional, or he was damned. A diver might be stupid, but he had to be able to hold his breath for three minutes or five, and be fearless of sharks. So, in calling their skipper "Lucky," Knudsen's men had turned the spotlight on his luck, instead of on the strong sense of honor and the fighting heart that made them follow him.

"Briefly and politely," he said to himself as he plodded along the hot sand that masked the rock and coral of the flat island, "he's got to be sure I'm not going to become a Jonah."

He grimaced, and shook his turbaned head as though to clear it from the effects of a stiff punch. A strong man can prove himself by lifting weights, but this business of demonstrating unfailing luck was worse than telling your dog to do tricks for visitors.

He squared his shoulders; his long woollen cloak hung once more in a straight line to his ankles. His crew and his forty foot *sambuk* waited for him at the harbor. There was a cargo of rice and rawhide going to Hadramaut.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chickens squawked and goats bleated among the brush huts that were sprawled along the crescent-shaped waterfront of Djumelay. Brown women carrying earthen jars on their heads, glided toward the single brackish well that supplied the village; the smell of spices, of mutton roasting over open fires made Knudsen hungry.

Perhaps fifty boats, ranging from forty foot *sambuks* like his own up to a bulky *dhow* of two hundred tons burden, rolled lazily in the placid water. Their raking masts were thin lines against the western red and their hulls were black. One boat made Knudsen shake his head, somewhat enviously.

She was not a great deal bigger than his own *sambuk,* but she was built of Indian teak—the Majid, the fastest boat on the Red Sea, whose owner and captain was an Arab named Khalil. A sea-hawk, this Khalil, who did not always buy the cargoes he sold in Djumelay; and who was not above smuggling an occasional load of Soudanese slaves to Arabia.

The bare bodies of his crew gleamed in the fading light. They were heaving at the lines, and Khalil stood on the poop, watching the long yard creak up the mast. Her three-cornered lateen sail bellied in the faint breeze, and the chanting of the crew died out as she tacked swiftly out of the harbor. Admiring the rakish *Majid* had made Knudsen for a moment forget Nureddin's rebuff.

Fires now winked along the shore. Groups of fishermen, mending their nets while waiting for *dourra* cakes to bake, saluted Knudsen; he was one of them and hardly considered as a foreigner.

But the chatter of the village presently took a new tone. There was a yell, then wrathful shouting that drowned the wails of a group of women who had just received word of calamity. A relative lost in a wreck, or a diver eaten by sharks, Knudsen did not know which.

This was all in the day's work, but that angry uproar was not.

A MAN was running down the beach. He had stopped yelling, since no one lifted a hand to help. Men came from the thatched huts to join the pursuit. A few of the pack had knives, but most of them were unarmed; some were Arabs, and some Somalis like the man who fled.

He stumbled.

Knudsen heard his sobbing breath. Stones pelted about him. As he recovered, one thumped between his shoulders. He lurched forward, clawing the sand. Naked except for a loincloth, it was plain to see that he was well-built and tall. He was bleeding from blows and stone wounds.

The poor devil was completely spent. There was no boat to which he could swim for refuge, and the village offered him no shelter.

Knudsen scowled and shook his head. Minding one's own business is the prime secret of longevity in Djumelay; but seeing a man hunted down grated.

Knudsen hesitated. Mixing into a feud was a thankless task. They'd get the victim later, and then look for anyone whoever had helped him. Then he caught the first plain words of the howling pursuers: *"Chakaba!"*

The man's big chest was conspicuous, even in that failing light. He was a diver. And they were stoning him.

Knudsen now understood the shrill wailing of the women. This was no thief or slayer, but a *chakaba;* a Jonah

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whose presence attracted calamity.

Knudsen stepped into the path of the crowd. He held up his hand, and his bulk made the three leaders of the pack pull up, and then wheel. The fugitive had stumbled again. Two more of the crowd caught up, and closed in.

Knudsen snatched a hefty chunk of driftwood from the sand and bounded after them. "Stop!" he shouted in Arabic. "Stop! He is my protected!"

He cracked down, and each blow sounded like a pistol shot. Two men flattened across their victim; that protected him against the blows and missiles of the others. They turned on Knudsen, but only after they had recoiled half a dozen yards, and the tail of the mob had arrived.

Knudsen towered a head over every Arab in the pack, and he was heavier than the Somali and Sudanese divers. The failing light magnified his bulk, and so did his voice and boldness. "This man is on my head, and if he dies, I will require his life of you!"

Declaring a blood feud with a whole town was quite a contract. But there was an uneasy muttering, and no one called his hand. Several dropped their cudgels, and Knudsen did likewise. He folded his arms, and said, "Go in peace, little brothers. See, he is alive."

Most of the crowd agreed to leave. One protested: "Friend, you do not know what you do. Four times Yussuf the Chakaba has been the only one to come ashore alive from a wreck. Today, for the second time, a partner of his was eaten by a shark."

Knudsen flung back his head and laughed gustily. "Am I not both Sa'id and Sa'oud? The luck of the lucky is proof against the misfortune."

When the crowd scattered, Knudsen and Yussuf walked down the beach toward the Dane's *sambuk*. His own men, too far down the waterfront to have been attracted by the stoning, were crowding about a stall where a wrinkled old woman sold cakes and bits of grilled mutton. They recognized their leader in the gloom, but paid no attention to his companion.

"Musa!"

The mate, a grizzled Somali, came forward. "Hearkening and obedience, Captain."

"We sail in the morning. And here is a passenger. Take us aboard."

Musa had one of the crew paddle the two to the *Suhayl*. She was anchored some distance out, having put into Djumelay only because of Knudsen's visit to Nureddin Ayyub.

The Jonah stretched his battered body on deck near a coil of cable. Knudsen went into his six-foot cabin, after telling the cook to prepare some food.

THE next morning, Knudsen wondered at the long faces of the crew. "Weigh the anchor," he said. "What are you waiting for?"

Musa shot a sour glance at Yussuf, ostentatiously spat at his shadow, and answered, "There is no room for a passenger."

Knudsen began to understand, but he said, "Make room!"

The mate gulped, fidgeted, then went forward to join the crew. They were clustered about their pot of rice and fish; eating took an unusually long time. Ordinarily, they wolfed a meal in three minutes. No one was singing, and that was uncommon.

The crew followed Musa back to where Knudsen sat on the low poop, smoking a cigarette. "Well? What's the delay?"

Musa stuttered, "We beg pardon of Allah, but doubtless you do not know

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who this Yussuf is. It is not well to sail with him."

The Jonah flinched, shrank a little nearer to his protector. Being kicked and cursed and stoned, wherever his evil name followed him, had robbed him of all spirit. Knudsen had a chance to say that he did not know what Yussuf was; Musa tactfully gave him that opening. But Knudsen had a personal grudge against the Red Sea's emphasis on luck.

"I know well that this is Yussuf the Chakaba. And he is sailing, *inshallah.*

The seamed face of the mate tightened. The men behind him whispered. The faithful old fellow did not like to defy Knudsen but his fear drove him. "Master, he will bring us evil. We will be wrecked, or *harami* will rob us. Verily, Khalil left last night, and no man knows where he will lie in wait."

Knudsen shrugged. "Sail at once."

"Master, that we will not do. Not with a *chakaba.*"

"O men!" Knudsen rose, and on the poop he towered over them. "My luck is stronger than this man's misfortune. When they were going to kill him, did they not drop their stones and run when he came into the presence of my fortune?"

Musa gulped. "*Wallah,* that is true."

"If it is written that we are to be wrecked or robbed, will putting this man ashore save us? Are you greater than Allah?"

He had them there. They weighed the anchor; and the yard slowly crawled up the mast. But the men did not sing. Knudsen said to Yussuf, "You have never been in Hadramaut. No one knows you there. So you will be safe."

Yussuf was too overcome with gratitude to say anything. He bowed his forehead to the deck, until the fish oil of the planks smeared him.

"Get up!" Knudsen said. "And give thanks to Allah."

He was on edge all that day; not as much from the risk of mutiny, as from the chance that the least untoward circumstances might drive his crew to panic. They would not let the Jonah dip into their pot of food. They carefully circled his shadow, when it threatened to touch them.

And Knudsen had another fear; all Djumelay knew that he had willfully taken a *chakaba* aboard. That would discredit his judgment, and confirm Nureddin Ayyub's doubts. To take such an insane chance was risking his own life, his men, his ships. But he still could not have let the Jonah be stoned to death. Once away from his reputation, Yussuf would be a new man.

That first day, the triangular fins of sharks cut the water. They smelled the rawhide and dried fish aboard the Suhayl. Musa spat and said, "Let them have the *chakaba!* Grab him and heave him over!"

Knudsen heard, and came from his cabin in time to stop them. "He is on my head." For the time being, that saved Yussuf.

SEVERAL days later, one of the treacherous storms near Bab el Mandeb caught the *sambuk.* She had weathered many before, and worse; but this time, the sullen waves broke over her, and the wind nearly laid her on her beam.

Before the bewildered crew could get into action, the swiftly traveling squall tore the canvas to shreds. With wind and current fighting each other, the *Suhayl* was swept closer to the ragged Arabian coast.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were reefs, some of them scarcely visible even in favorable weather, and the shore was lined with the skeletons of ships that had smashed on the rocks. Bab el Mandeb, "the Gate of Tears," seemed well named.

Recovering a little, the crew rigged a storm sail. That helped steady her. They were too busy to revolt when Yussuf joined to lend a hand; but they were reciting the *Fatah*, and looking at Knudsen in a way that put the whole threatening disaster on his shoulders.

"A reef!" the Jonah yelled, and gestured.

Knudsen squinted through the spray of waves breaking over the deck. It was awash, kneedeep most of the time.

A line had been stretched, so that the men who struggled with the hatch cover would not be swept overboard. As it was, she had shipped all too much water, and wallowed loggily in the green flood.

If he could run through the narrow passage, the *Suhayl* could win the lee of a headland, where it was calm enough.

A man joined him at the tiller bar. Tacking in this insane sea was ticklish work. One of the crew was washed overboard.

Knudsen could not have had a boat lowered; he was not even certain that one remained.

Knudsen gritted his teeth, felt the shoulder of the man who bent with him on the tiller. He shouted an order, watched the men snap to it. He'd make it! Jonah or no Jonah!

But he had not counted on the yard that no one had been able to lower, since the sudden fury of that freakish squall had given so little warning. It was over fifty feet long, and weighed better than four hundred pounds. It broke, crashing to the deck, and bringing with it the lines, and the heavy sheaves. Two men, flattened by the wreckage, wallowed in the water. The yardarm grazed Knudsen's shoulder, and the numbing blow took the strength he needed now of all times.

Then the *Suhayl* shuddered. A shock racked her, as a bullet shakes a gazelle that is running too fast to drop at once, though drilled through the heart.

"Ship aground!" Musa cried.

Knudsen's recovery had come too late. He had missed by a few feet. The jib tore loose. The *Suhayl's* hold was flooded; a tongue of rock had ripped her planks well below the water line.

She settled a little, and broke free. The wind twisted, now driving her through the passage. But she foundered midway, her deck only a few inches above water. Then, freakishly as it had started, the wind eased.

Waves rolled over the bulwark, broke over the poop, but she was well made, and though she groaned, she would survive.

The men, stunned by the fall of the yard, were disengaging themselves. One had a face the size of a watermelon, swollen from the blow. The other limped, and rubbed one arm. Knudsen felt let down, almost sick, his fight against the shock, which had broken his sweep of the tiller, left him limp. He slumped in a heap, and the man at his side did likewise.

There was nothing to be done. One boat still was secure, but the other was gone. Until the sea subsided, no one could try to get ashore; and the barren rocks and beach left little choice between the water and the land.

A YELL brought Knudsen to his feet. He stumbled over wreckage, and crashed down among the rigging

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that littered the deck. When he recovered, he saw Musa and four of the crew shading their eyes and studiously squinting toward the cliffs.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"We thought we saw men ashore."

"That scared you, eh?" Something was wrong. "Where are they?"

"*Wallah,* they hid, suddenly."

Knudsen spat. "So they're scared of us, huh? Try again!"

"Master, they may be *jan* or *ghuls,* seeking men to eat," Musa insisted. "Verily, demons haunt this coast."

They should be demanding the Jonah's life, instead of worrying about devils ashore. Knudsen would have thought of that sooner had he not been dizzy from battering, and from the wreck of his ship. He glanced about, counting noses. It was Salah who had been washed over the side, poor devil. This second yell still rang in Knudsen's ears, and it had the terror of Salah's last cry.

"Where's Yussuf?"

No one answered. Knudsen's cold eyes made them turn to avoid him. He knew now that Yussuf the Chakaba had been flung over the side as quickly as the men found a moment's respite.

His ship finished, the Knudsen luck would be thoroughly discredited; it seemed almost as if the question proposed by Nureddin Ayyub had received its damning answer.

"Lucky! Yeah, lucky all right!" he muttered, wondering if indeed the *Suhayl* could stay together until the sea subsided; that would take several hours, and the sun was setting.

Now that the Jonah was gone, the crew fell to work without complaint. A diver went into the hold and fastened a line to a butt of fresh water. Bags of rice and salt fish were salvaged.

It was nearly dark before the remaining *pirogue* could be launched with provisions and four men; two to remain ashore, and a pair to paddle back. The shallow sea, suddenly whipped to fury, was as quickly quieting, particularly inside the roof.

Instead of waiting for the return of the boat, Knudsen and Musa heaved cases of kerosene over the side. Each contained two tins, and the contents being lighter than water, they floated. Musa went over after them, and lashed them together again. All hands followed him, and swimming, they pushed the raft before them. The sight of this salvage, stacked up on the beach, cheered Knudsen. There was chance, not only of getting the *Suhayl* afloat, but of saving most of the cargo by drying it on the beach.

Arab nomads might seize the loot, but that would be no worse than letting the sea keep it. He had to try.

It was too dark to find much driftwood, but kerosene poured over the wet pieces that the men picked up furnished a beacon. And aboard the *Suhayl,* a bowl of oil, fitted with a twist of soaked canvas, made a sputtering torch by whose light Knudsen and the night shift worked.

Luckily, two were expert divers. They plunged blindly into the blackness of the hold, lashed several bales together, and came up to rest while the others hauled. By fast work, some of the rice could be saved; the rawhides, sacks of crude incense gum, and bales of wool would not be ruined.

While Knudsen napped on the poop, Musa took charge. At dawn, the *Suhayl* was far from unloaded; but enough of her cargo had been unshipped to allow an inspection of the damage to the hull.

Knudsen stretched his weary frame,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and nudged the diver who snored beside him. 'Wake up, Aswad. Got daylight now! Eat, and down you go again!"

The hatchet-faced Dankali blinked and grinned. Musa was washing the salt from some coffee beans. These he roasted over the kerosene flare, and pulverized them in the cook's spice mortar. As the steaming bowl passed from hand to hand, the mate said, "The sharks smell the hides soaking in the hold. Look at them."

Knudsen nodded. "I saw them while you were pounding your ear."

Musa tossed a bull hide far over the side. As the sharks raced for it, and the water reddened when they bit each other as well as the uncured skin, Aswad went over the rail. He had a knife in hand, and rope under his armpits.

When the Dankali was hauled up out of the water, an instant before the return of the sharks, he said, "We can fix the hole. With planks from the deck. *Wallah,* it is easy, now that the *chakaba* is gone. "

THE men were haggard, red-eyed; battered and bruised and cut, but they worked on. They were entitled to their bit of logic, after all. Knudsen said, "Put a patch on the inside, and wedge it with bags of dry rice. With no Jonah aboard, it will hold."

That was work for the divers. The sun was overhead, blazing down on the deck until it steamed. A few muffled blows shook the planks as Knudsen paced up and down, squinting at the barren shore, where two men were spreading rice and hides along the beach to dry. Then Aswad came up for breath, and his partner went down.

Finally the sausage-shaped parcels of dry rice sewn up in sailcloth were stuffed between the patch, which was nailed to the ribs, and the intact planks of the outside. And while waiting for the rice to expand to make a water tight joint, the crew set to work on the broken yard and the rigging. There was enough canvas left to shape a small sail.

Then they manned the pump. Knudsen bent on the handle until sweat drenched him, and blisters broke in his calloused hands. A hot wind twisted from Arabia, showering the deck with scorching sand. There was no escape from it, but Knudsen grinned and blinked his reddened eyes.

Jonah or no, he was whipping the Red Sea.

Slowly, the *Suhayl* rose as her hold was drained; and the patch was not leaking. Around sunset, she was sailing across the lagoon. The passage through the reef was deep enough to permit returning, fully laden. And the closer to the beach, the easier to ferry the cargo aboard.

The men were singing again. The water in the butts was only slightly brackish, as little sea water had worked in through seams and bung.

There was a search for driftwood before night fell. Much of what they found was what remained of ships long since beaten to pieces. And near these grim relics was Salah's body.

They buried him in the sand at the foot of the cliffs, and marked his grave with a circle of round stones. But this did not long depress them; presently, they were composing a chant, and Aswad was making plans for Salah's widow, back in Suakin. *"Wallah,"* he said philosophically, "she was too young for him, anyway."

Later, Knudsen had to break up a fight. Salah, it seemed, had not left enough widows for everyone, and a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

matter of precedence came up. . . .

Peace restored, they speculated on Yussuf's resting place.

"The sea won't keep a *chakaba,*" Aswad contended.

"Neither will the land," Musa said, just as logically.

"If Allah forgives him the sins that made him a *chakaba,*" a forecastle theologian asserted, "then land or sea will receive him."

"Complete pardon, and he will wash ashore, and some pious men will bury him," Musa argued. "What do you say, master?"

"What man knows what Allah wills until it is done?" Knudsen evaded; he was wondering why the *chakaba* had not been washed ashore.

They heaped more driftwood on the fire; the flames burned with green and blue tongues and little ribbons of purple. Aswad grew tired of the song he had composed about his valiant diving. So he thumped a kerosene case and chanted, "Yussuf the Chakaba went over the side!"

"Ayá la há! Ayá la há!" the crew chorused.

"And Allah reached down and spoke to the storm," Aswad went on.

"Ayá la há! Ayá la há!"

The riddle of luck became plain to Kundsen; his crew could have outwitted the treacherous squall if their attention had not been centered on Yussuf. "And I wasn't all on the job," he reasoned, "because I was afraid they'd be afraid. He was a Jonah because everyone believed he was."

The fire was dying, and the crew were huddled about it. Knudsen, too weary to be as alert as he should have, was caught without any warning when a half dozen men rounded the headland. They fanned out in a crescent as Knudsen's cry aroused the sailors.

THE newcomers were fuzzy-headed Somalis; they wore heavy knives, and carried Enfield rifles whose muzzles converged on the group about the coals. The leader of the party was a lean Arab with a deeply lined face and a jutting nose. His sharply pointed beard added to the length of his jaw, and the flare of his nostrils gave a cattish twitch to his moustaches.

Knudsen recognized him: Khalil, the captain of the swift *Majid.* There was neither grimness nor outstanding cunning in Khalil's sharp face; sure of himself, he would be whatever he needed be.

Knudsen made no move to draw his revolver. His men had only their knives, and two rifles among them. This was no time to fight it out; he knew this, and also he knew better than to expect anything but pillage. So he said, *"As-salam 'aleikum!* The peace upon you, Khalil, and the blessing of Allah. Join us, for we have saved food and coffee from the sea."

The Arab smiled, appreciating coolness. "And upon you the Peace! For once I am lucky, my ship was not hurt."

His crew, tough and able-bodied as any on that wild coast, lowered their rifles, now that their *nakhoda* had offered the peace. But they hung back, Enfields across their knees, while Khalil went toward the fire.

Knudsen could have beaten the Arab to the draw, cut him down or seized him as a hostage; but in any case, he would sacrifice his crew in the free for all that would start before there could be any bargaining.

As Musa set about making coffee, the Arab went on, "We came ashore, seeking fresh water, and saw your fire. *Wallah,* on this wild coast, it would not be well to approach unarmed."

No one who knew the region as

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both captains did would expect to find water either by day or night. Knudsen said, "You are well arrived! How much do you want for salvaging my ship and cargo?"

"Twenty thousand *rupees.* I am hurrying south with a cargo of my own, and I will lose by any delay."

"All I have isn't worth ten thousand," Knudsen protested. "And my ship is afloat. I could do without help."

Khalil cut in, "But hasty patching won't last long. In fact, it was not entirely water that brought us ashore. A fisherman told me that there had been a wreck. So I came to save you from the nomads who comb the shore. They'll rob you before you can dry and reship your cargo. To say nothing of murdering you and selling your men as slaves."

Though nomads could and might do just that, Khalil had staked his claim. This was a slight case of piracy; but by politely calling it a bona fide salvage operation, there was a chance of survival.

An hour of wrangling, all of the friendliest, ended when Knudsen said, "Fifteen thousand. A draft on Nureddin Ayyub, who will pay you in Djumelay. Where I'll get my ship refitted."

"Allah, by Allah, and again, by Allah!" Khalil solemnly swore. "Your lives and your goods are on my head. Now, will you give me a present to seal the bargain?"

Khalil's eyes shifted to Knudsen's Colt revolver. An exchange of gifts was in order, since this had become a business deal. The big Dane could have settled with his watch, for courtesy, rooted in boldness, would have forbidden any demand for personal disarming. Knudsen, however, had other ideas.

That a Jonah had caused the wreck was conceivable; but the follow-up by Khalil was too much. Even a hoodoo has its limits, and Knudsen was beginning to suspect the presence of more than coincidence. He could not quite see the answer, but whether or not Yussuf was part of it, the best play was to out-Arab the pirate. He drew his Colt and said, "This is yours. And those two rifles are a gift from my men to your crew."

Khalil appreciated a man who met misfortune with dignity. When the arms changed hands, he unfastened the scabbard of the *jambia* that gleamed at his belt. The curved dagger was heavy with gold inlay, and rubies were in the hilt. It was an Arab gentleman's badge of rank, and he graciously offered it as such; though he had, on the face of it, gotten the best of the trade. But that also was as custom prescribed.

Then they exchanged compliments, and drank more coffee. Later, Knudsen said, "My men are battered and weary, and they are sad from burying a shipmate. Out of your goodness, let them go aboard the *Majid,* while your fresh crew guard my goods. They have endured my misfortune, and it is not fitting that a leaky ship make them uneasy and frightened."

Khalil had come ashore in two pirogues. Both were needed to carry him and Knudsen and the *Suhayl's* crew to the *Majid.*

A LANTERN in the cabin of the *Majid* guided the boats to their destination, once they crossed the passage through the reef. Knudsen's men were half asleep when the watch hailed them. They clambered aboard, and Khalil's Arab mate gestured toward the companionway that opened

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the forecastle. Musa and Aswad remained on deck, and followed Knudsen into the cabin; they were to witness the salvage agreement.

Knudsen picked up a reed, dipped it into a saucer filled with ink-soaked silk threads, and began writing. Khalil cut in, saying, "It is only proper that we tow your boat, even though she may be sailed. Nureddin Ayyub might otherwise think that I overcharged you."

Knudsen wrote that clause into the agreement. Piracy with minute attention to public opinion was not entirely a novelty on the Red Sea. While the ransom was ruinous, time could cure that; what would finish him was having defied common sense by harboring a Jonah. But most of the pirate's men were ashore, and that offered possibilities; surrender had made Khalil bold.

"You will be comfortable with your men, *ya nakhoda,*" Kahalil said, when the draft was signed. "My cabin is small, and it would not be fitting having you sleep on deck, like a pilgrim."

"My men would be lost without me," Knudsen agreed, blandly.

Two of the crew guarded the companionway. Whatever went down would not come up except by permission. Knives were no match for rifles.

One of Khalil's men took the lantern to light the way forward. The *Majid* had not suffered from the squall that was enriching her owner. From a hatchway came the smell of coffee; tobacco and incense were below, destined for Maskat and the nomad chiefs of Hadramaut.

Some of the crew were asleep, white huddles under the protection of the yard. Each had a rifle beside him. This was a ship much like the *Suhayl,* but better fitted in every detail. Lucky Knudsen wondered how many skippers had contributed to the *Majid's* building.

The sleepers stirred, having been aroused by the voices in the cabin. One sat up and blinked in the lantern glow. He acted as though something pleasantly expected had materialized. His yell of delight came just as Knudsen recognized him and without any surprise. Yussuf the Chakaba had not drowned, being seasoned in surviving disaster at sea.

Musa recoiled and made choking sounds. Khalil halted and so did the man with the lantern. Yussuf bounded forward, then sank to his knees.

"*Ammi,* when I was washed overboard, it pleased Allah that the small boat which you lost should be afloat and at hand. It rode the storm, and I was picked up, so I begged the *nakhoda* to seek you."

"You did well, Yussuf, putting me into the hands of Khalil!"

The Jonah crouched there, eyes suddenly saucer round. His surprise was apparent; he could not have known whose hands had saved him. "Allah! They did not tell me—*ammi,* I thought—"

"Get up!" said Knudsen. "There is no help for this, and I forgive you."

"I am still your protected?" He choked, his brown face twitched, and there were tears in his eyes. "Allah bear witness, I did not know."

Khalil was stroking his beard and smiling. He relished such a situation, and he recited from the Koran, *"Paradise is for those who bridle their wrath, and for those who forgive men, for God loveth the beneficent."*

By then Musa had regained his voice, and so had Aswad. From thinking that Yussuf had returned from the dead to accuse them of throwing him overboard, they now knew that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something undying had come to bring a final doom.

The mate yelled, "I take refuge with Allah! Khalil, throw him to the sharks —slay him—he is a *chakaba!*"

"What?" The Arab started. "This man caused the wreck?"

"Yea, and the falling into your hands!"

Aswad stuttered, "*Wallah,* this is Yussuf the Chakaba, and our master saved him from vengeance at Djumelay."

Khalil drew back and one hand went to the butt of his revolver. The sleepers under the yard were scrambling away from the Jonah's contamination. Knudsen smelled sweat of Somali and Arab gripped to the heart by fear. Khalil now knew what had happened to Knudsen's luck and that the rash white *nakhoda's* hoodoo was aboard the fortunate *Majid.*

YUSSUF knew that there was no hope for him. He looked up, but could not beg his protector's help; his lips were dry. Knudsen saw a man like himself; a man damned by a name. He said, "This man is my protected, and his evil is upon me! O Khalil, you recited the words which made Hassan the son of Ali forgive a slave. As Hassan gave the offender a gift, I give this man a gift and take from him any evil to your ship!"

He unhooked the jeweled dagger and scabbard and presented it to Yussuf. Then he turned to Musa and Aswad, who were eyeing each other.

"Since he is your protected," Khalil said, "take him to your ship. Your men stay with me. I have them, and your order on Nureddin!"

This was evading a blood issue. To Musa, it was dooming Knudsen. He drew his knife and lunged at Yussuf, who had risen, still dazed and fingering the dagger that was the badge of a gentleman. The Jonah ducked, but kept his footing on the slippery deck. His next move caught all hands off guard. Instead of running from Musa, he hurled himself at Khalil.

No one could understand what he said; it was the snarl of a man beyond reason or feeling. The Arab drew his revolver, but the big Somali enveloped him. There was a wild shot, and a second, as the two went over the side.

That Khalil was in shark-infested water, grappling with a *chakaba,* shook the crew; that Knudsen's two men had howled for the hoodoo's life made them feel secure as they bounded to the rail to fling Khalil a rope.

Knudsen seized a belaying pin and smacked down on the skull of the hindmost. He yelled, "Nail 'em!"

His booming voice warned the disconcerted men. They had their rifles in an instant, but the prisoners in the hold had heard the shots, and were on the heels of the two guards who had left the companionway. In this dog fight, rifles were of no use. Knives and belaying pins were all that could serve in close quarters; and with so many of Khalil's crew ashore, there was only one way the fight could end.

A few minutes later, Knudsen's slashed and battered men were flinging dead and wounded over the side; the water was phosphorescent from the swift approach of sharks. Musa grinned, and picked up the lantern, which still burned. "*Ammi,* did not your luck come back when the *chakaba* went over the side?"

There was no use trying to convince the stubborn Somali that desperation and penitence had driven Yussuf to an insane move which caught Khalil off guard. He said, "That agreement

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the cabin is proof of extortion. Make sail right away. We've got a new boat. The boys ashore have ours. A fair trade, and I can make that stick!"

They went to weigh the anchor. They were singing now; but their song ended in a gasp. That was when a man, dripping and carrying a gleaming dagger between his teeth, clambered up the cable and over the rail. Yussuf had returned, and he said, "*Ammi,* being a diver, I was used to sharks. Khalil was not, so I left him for them."

Knudsen gave his men no chance to speak. He said, "Verily, this man is a *chakaba,* but what man can bring bad luck to me? Heave there! We're going to tell Nureddin a few things!"

They heaved and they sang. And when the wind filled the *Majid's* sail, sending her skimming swiftly northward, Knudsen knew that he had convinced the Red Sea, even though he had not tested the plan he had shaped against Khalil.

He listened for a moment to the humming of the taut shrouds, the voice of the canvas. Then he grinned at the stars, and shrugged. "Who cares whether it was luck or sense? Nureddin won't, and neither will the crew!"

? How Would You Like ?

$1,000 EVERY THURSDAY

Watch The ARGOSY

MR. WRIGHT FOUND OUT HE WAS WRONG!
MR. WRIGHT: Gee, this stuff is awful! Why do all laxatives taste so bad?
MRS. WRIGHT: All of them don't. Ex-Lax tastes like delicious chocolate.
MR. W.: Ex-Lax? That's O.K. for you and Junior, but I need something stronger!
MRS. W.: No, you don't! Ex-Lax is just as effective as any bad-tasting cathartic.
LATER
MR. W.: I sure am glad I took your advice. It's Ex-Lax for me from now on.
MRS. W.: Yes, with Ex-Lax in the house we don't need any other laxative!
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.
10¢ and 25¢
EX-LAX
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then I'll Remember

You wake up some day and find yourself broke with two hundred grand. They call you an arch criminal—and jail you overnight as drunk and disorderly. You're friendless, but sought out eagerly by flocks of people who recognize you only too well. There's a blonde and a brunette, and they both want you. Then you'll remember . . .

By CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN

Author of "Midnight Haul," "Bullhead Takes All," etc.

CHAPTER I

APPALLING EYE

HE HADN'T any idea where he was going. And what was worse, he had even less of an idea where he'd been. The holiday shoppers who thronged against and peered enrapt into the gift-surfeited display windows of the department stores meant nothing to him.

Almost as if some perverse instinct impelled him, he kept careening into people who were being disgorged from the office buildings in the eddying five-thirty breakaways from work. His mumbled apologies were brushed aside, or received with hostile stares that momentarily effaced festive smiles; and once or twice he was the victim of sharply reciprocal bumps and angry flaring words.

He accepted both physical and verbal rebukes with a diffidence and bewilderment that somehow he sensed were incongruous to his basic nature.

Most probably the people he rammed into thought he was drunk. He wasn't drunk. He hadn't hoisted one since—he couldn't remember when. Anyway, there wasn't any elation in his stomach or head. There was just that ache—in his head. That bad ache in his head.

He weaved a little, his legs again warping like barrel staves, and there was a jar against his shoulder and a feminine voice shrilled indignantly in his ear. He stood staring down uncertainly at the thick lisle-stockinged legs of the woman and at the litter of parcels strewn around the broad blunt pumps.

The parcels were gaudily done up in green and red and some diaphanous stuff of midnight blue with silver stars on it and they were covered with *Merry Christmas* seals and *Do Not Open Till Dec. 25th* stickers.

The seals and stickers reminded him of how cold it was; of the fine scurries of granulated snow which had let up a few minutes ago but which would spill again like intermittent shakes of a salt-cellar; of the wind that sheeted unobstructed through his rumpled gray suit because for some reason he had no overcoat.

He tried bending over to retrieve the parcels for the woman but the movement set the pain in his head glowing red like hot coals and he had to straighten up quickly, which brought dizziness. He said wearily:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Smith swung; Blackie's hand passed quickly across his chest, and held a pistol

"I'm sorry. I'm so darn sorry. Somebody will pick them up for you."

He would have moved on, somehow, but the thick legs planted themselves invincibly in front of him and the woman's thick face, red from the icy wind, shrilled loudly at him.

"You pick them up. You knocked them down. Clumsy ox! You drunken bums ought not be allowed free on the streets to molest women. . . . Here, here! Don't you try to fall against me!"

Her pudgy gloved hand fastened on the lapel of his coat. "You pick those packages up, you drunken rascal, or—Officer! Officer. . . ."

The traffic cop in the middle of the street intersection shrugged and started walking toward them.

Vaguely the man remembered the policeman's face from encountering it a few minutes ago, but the face had been good-natured with a holiday grin of admonition then. Now it was stern with irritation. His voice was as bleak as the biting wind.

"Look buddy, this is the third time you've bumped around this same block. Merry Christmas and all that, but you've had too much merry Christmas."

"The drunken dirty lout," the woman shrilled. "Look at my shopping—all over the sidewalk in this snow."

Her face was purple.

An amused crowd was beginning to collect.

The cop said, "Now slide along home, bud, and no more tying up pedestrian traffic or you know where you'll be sleeping off that merry Christmas."

The cop winked at the protesting woman and began picking up her parcels and stacking them in her arms. It was starting to snow again.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE man got out of their way and moved on, trying his best to delineate a course and avoid collisions on the crowded pavement. The snow began whirling down in violent, fitful gusts, the flakes clinging to the front of his suit and not dissolving.

He wanted to move quickly, to run, and so work some warmth into his frozen body. But he knew the exertion of running would cause his head to split wide open.

"Wide open. Move slowly. And freeze."

If he could find some place warm to sit down for a moment, some place inside; if he could thaw out, collect his wits and think—and try to remember. There was no use venturing into one of the stores again, wandering around pretending to shop. He had tried twice and been asked out twice.

He didn't blame them. That one reflection he had caught of himself in the store mirror had convinced him those floorwalkers had every reason to be suspicious.

It was a shock, that mirror. It was like being raised from childhood in a room of darkness and suddenly granted permission to see a man you had never seen before and who you found out was yourself.

The mirror had revealed a repulsive sight. Someone who might be still in his twenties stared back at him. The shoulders were high and wide and he was lean-hipped; but there all normality ended.

The face had a stubby growth of black beard which made the cheeks look gaunt and incredibly dirty. There was a cut on the nose, a nasty cut traceable by a thin line of blood which had darkened and clotted; the left eye was swollen and bruised and black.

But it was the other eye, the good eye, which sent the panic of complete dismay shuddering through him. The expression of bewilderment—he could understand that; and the sharp pain in it—he expected that. But the look of absolute vacancy, the hopeless, stupid vacancy of that eye—as if the vitality of life had slipped away and there were nothing behind the eye but the dampness of old rains and the darkness of hundreds of forgotten days and nights.

He pulled his mind abruptly from the thought of that glimpse of himself. He swerved away from a display window he seemed to be heading into.

If he had a quarter, or even fifteen cents, he could drop into a movie, a blessed warm movie. But there was no money in his pockets; there was nothing at all in his pockets.

Not a single means of identification—only a crumpled copy of the New York *Times*, dated December Twenty-second. Funny how he could unaccountably sense the city he was walking aimlessly in was not New York. He couldn't describe New York and had no way of knowing whether he'd ever been there; but some definite instinct told him this was not New York.

Funny, also, how the downtown district of a city will be so absolutely devoid of any indication what city that district is a part of. True, there was a Chicago Millinery Store and a Cleveland Hotel; but there was also a Maryland Hardware Shop and a Philadelphia Tailoring, Incorporated.

And nowhere—in weather like this—did there seem to be any newstands or newsboys hawking their papers; nor had he come across a drug store with its inevitable public phone booths and racks of phone directories.

The culmination of weakness from the cold and from fatigue came over

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him and he leaned against the corner of a building to keep from falling. Strength ebbed from his legs and he sagged, his back scraping down the snow-flecked bricks of the wall.

Somebody yelled, "Watch the drunk! He's taking a dive!"

He lay sprawled on the pavement for a moment, the snow feeling almost warm against his face; and then realization of what he had done came surging over him, crested by a sharp terror.

For the fourth time he had been afraid to stagger across street intersections jammed with skidding vehicles, and for the fourth time he had rounded the same block, ending up here where that same cop . . .

FEAR galvanized his strength. He got to his feet as he saw the face of the cop materialize out of the surrounding ring of people. The cop's face was set and grim, anger tugging out his jaw.

He didn't want anything to do with cops. He didn't know why. That intangible instinct again. He tried to stagger through the crowd, get away from the cop. But the cop yanked him around by the shoulder.

"This is the fourth time, bud, and this is the last time." The cop's eyes were hard and sore. Taking time out like this irritated him; it meant he wouldn't be on hand in case some of the more beneficent-minded prominent citizens drove by his traffic post remembering that a cop wasn't impervious to a five or ten-dollar bill as a "little something for you and your kids, O'Leary. Merry Christmas."

O'Leary thrust his nose close to the other's mouth, took a loud sniff. "Just a little eggnog," he said sardonically. "Hell, it's a wonder a brewery like you can walk."

He jerked his chin in the direction of the call-box on the corner. "Come on, bud. We got a place where you can be a wild wolf an' a wooly wolf and tonight's your night to howl."

The other made no move to accompany the cop and the cop dragged him through a lane in the crowd to the call-box. The man looked at the box, his big shoulders shaking. He stood swaying on his feet, his thoughts suddenly desperate inside his agonized head.

"I'm not a drunk," he said. "I haven't had a drink for—"

He stopped, knowing suddenly that his words were lies. He had an obscure picture of a man bending over him, pouring some burning raw whisky down his throat. The man had some kind of a uniform cap on his head and seemed to be in the midst of a lot of criss-crossed and interlaced wire, wire that somehow gave the appearance of a giant cage.

That was all of the picture he could summon. It seemed ages ago, but he knew in reality it must have occurred very recently—perhaps just a few minutes ago.

"I . . . Maybe somebody did give me a drink to—"

The cop hung up the receiver and turned to him.

"Say, you didn't drink it. You inhaled it."

The other suddenly blurted: "Look, I'm giving it to you straight. What city is this?"

There wasn't any humor in the cop's thin smile.

"What city is this?" he repeated. "What gag is that? No, you ain't drunk. This is Baltimore. It's the twenty-third of December and Abraham Lincoln's been dead quite a spell." He turned and dispersed the crowd.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The other thought: I can't let a cop take me in. Somehow I know I can't afford to have anything to do with a cop.

Nervousness and fear seemed to have stimulated his strength. He broke away from the hand on his shoulder, lunged forward. His legs didn't carry him far. The cop caught him, spun him around, raised his club threateningly.

THEN what seemed to the man to be a miracle occurred. One second the cop was barging forward, club upraised; the next second the cop was sitting in the thin dirty snow of the gutter, his left eye already closing as it puffed, a trickle of blood leaking from the corner of his torn lips.

The other stood motionless, like a statue of a scarecrow, his hands still out, wooden, in the position where they'd hit the cop's face. The man wasn't thinking of anything but the expression on the cop's face. If he never remembered anything else in his life he'd never erase the expression of that cop from his mind.

The cop scrambled up and in his hand was his heavy Police Positive. He said, "If you want it tough like that," and reversed the revolver so that his fist held the barrel. Then he cracked each of the immobile arms of the man, cracked each one once with the revolver butt.

The other thought both of his wrists were broken. He let them sink limply to his sides. The brittle pain in them was almost equal to the pain in his head. He looked at his wrists but he wasn't thinking about them or the pain in them.

He was thinking about the expression on the cop's face when he sat in the gutter, and thinking that somewhere in the blind mists of the past he had seen that expression before.

He closed his mind to that kind of thinking.

In the central precinct station a bored desk sergeant dismissed "drunken and disorderly conduct" along with "vagrancy" in favor of the more serious charge of "resisting arrest, assaulting an officer."

O'Leary was temporarily relieved from duty to report to the station infirmary and have his face patched up.

The desk sergeant jotted down the name the man had given him and remarked with utmost patience:

"How you Smiths do get about. And most of you generally in the can." He raised a quizzical eyebrow, added laconically, "Stop me if I'm wrong, but the first name will be John, won't it?" And at the man's tired nod, he repeated philosophically: "John Smith. We had an Ichabod Smith in here once and I let him go on grounds of originality."

There wasn't anything in his pockets for them to hold for him. The sergeant permitted him to keep the crumpled copy of the *Times*.

There was a moment when the thought of being buried for any length of time in jail—with no means of communication with the outside, and no idea with whom to communicate if there had been any means—drove the man to say:

"I've got to see a doctor. My head . . ."

"Sure, John Smith." The sergeant winked at the other cops in the squad room. "Feels just like Pocahontas let that Injun beat on it all day with a tommyhawk, don't it? You don't need a doctor, you need a bromo. Unfortunately, we ain't got a bromo in the house."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He felt too weak, too sick to object. The best thing was to get off his feet quickly, lie very still. . . .

He was the sole occupant of his cell. He did not do much thinking. The warmth of the place was a beneficence that soothed and lulled the pain in his wrists and head, induced a blessed sleep that would bring strength.

He slept soundly on the hard steel bunk and only once, in the first hours of the morning, did he awake with his forehead coldly wet and hoarse words coming from his throat.

"I won't do it. Somebody else. Somebody else. I won't do it."

In the limbo of half-sleep he could not concentrate his senses to analyze what he was saying or thought he was saying. He knew only that his head did not ache quite so much as before, that the rest was doing him good.

He fell asleep again immediately and after that was quiet. . . .

CHAPTER II

SHADOW BEHIND BARS

THE turnkey, whose uniform was messy and too small for him and whose close-clipped thin hair made his forehead look as if it ran back uninterrupted to the crown of his head, stood at the cell door with a tin cup in one hand and a tin plate in the other.

Faint whorls of steam rose from the cup and plate. The turnkey expertly kicked at the cell door without causing the contents of the cup or plate to spill.

He had already given the other inmates their breakfasts. It was his habit to reserve the last breakfast for the most distinguished or notorious prisoner of the evening, thereby granting the privileged man an extra twenty minutes of sleep.

There was a certain respectful demeanor in the way he kicked at the door of the cell, softly and steadily, in order not to startle the occupant too sharply from his sleep.

John Smith roused himself, coming instantly awake, swinging his legs over the side of the steel bunk and looking up at the turnkey without blinking.

The turnkey said, "Good mornin'," and showed tobacco-stained teeth in a grin. "Here's what we kiddingly call breakfast. I shove it under the grate an' you pull it through."

John Smith almost missed his breakfast. As he bent over to pick it up, pain so sharp as to be blinding rushed into his head. It was all right when he was standing up; just a dull heavy ache that could be endured. His wrists were better too; there were nasty bruises on them and they were sore, but that was all.

What impressed him most was the way his mind seemed to be functioning, clearly, keenly, with none of that sluggishness of yesterday. He found that he could depict in detail every incident that had occurred since he had come to on the street. Beyond that was an unsurmountable wall that shut off retrogressive thought.

He tried to bend for the food again. He said, "Sorry. Can't make it."

The turnkey nodded and grinned. He set the cup on the cement floor, produced his keys and opened the door. He picked up the cup and handed it and the plate to John Smith. Then he locked the door and said:

"Know how you feel myself. Hangovers don't stand much bendin'. Like somebody drivin' tacks in your head."

John Smith sat on his bunk and ate. It wasn't very good but it was hot. The turnkey appeared reluctant to leave. He grinned through the bars.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How's it taste—lousy? Usually does."

John Smith made a noncommittal sound.

The turnkey shifted from foot to foot.

"For half a buck I could magic a pack of cigarettes or a cigar."

John Smith shook his head.

"For two bits?"

"Haven't any money."

"You could owe it to me. They'll give your things back when you get out."

"I haven't any there either. There wasn't any in my pockets."

The turnkey gave him a short chiding laugh. "You ain't fooling anybody. You got plenty of dough, or can get it. We know who you are."

JOHN Smith stood up very quickly, the tin cup clattering to the floor. He walked over to the door, gripped the bars and even at that moment was fleetingly surprised at his own grip. He said:

"What do you mean, you know who I am?"

The turnkey backed away, his high bald forehead getting very white. Quickly he said:

"No harm meant. You know how it is. I don't actually know who you are, but us boys on night duty couldn't help noticin' who come for you last night. We know who you're connected with an' that means you ain't no tinhorn—"

"Somebody came for me—and you didn't let me see—"

The turnkey grinned. "No use wakin' you. He didn't want to wake you. He come down an' took a look at you poundin' your ear."

John Smith made his voice quiet, casual. "Who was it came for me?"

"As if you didn't know."

"I know I have a right to find out who—"

"Sure, sure. No harm meant." The turnkey fingered his clipped hair. "Well, he said his name was somethin'-or-other Mallory, but we recognized him as Joe Kehawkin. He's pretty easy to recognize."

"Oh. Joe Kehawkin. Sure." He said the name matter-of-factly. The turnkey grinned sheepishly.

"You take Joe Kehawkin in your stride. But we know who he's with. We hear of his boss even in a burg like Baltimore. Bein' with a powerful outfit like that must be somethin'. Pretty soft for you."

The turnkey's admiration and envy were clearly expressed on his face. "Anything you want holler down the end of the hall." He started to move away.

"Why didn't Joe Kehawkin get me out?"

The turnkey stopped.

"No bond bailsmen 'round that time of night. Not that you'll be needin' one, I guess. But court ain't till ten in the mornin'. You always got to wait till then."

"Oh."

"Mr. Kehawkin tried to take care of the cop you beat up. But O'Leary's a sorehead. We know you was drunk, holiday cheer and that stuff. But O'Leary's a duty-stricken dope and he don't like big shots. He even went so far as to threaten Mr. Kehawkin on a charge of attempted bribery. O'Leary's a sap. I don't guess he'll press charges, though. You'll get your fine paid sometime this mornin' an' you'll be out. How 'bout the cigarettes or cigar?"

"No. No, thanks. Maybe later."

"Yell out, that's all."

The turnkey nodded amicably, and John Smith was left alone.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HE sat down on his bunk, took the *Times* out of his pocket, smoothed it on the mattress and for the hundredth time perused it as if some clue to his identity and the incidents leading to his present predicament were hidden in its crumpled pages.

Joe Kehawkin. The name was familiar. Not only some haunting elusive memory of the past, but something concrete, something that he had heard or seen recently.

Again he went through the paper, diligently, omitting nothing, left to right, page by page, section by section. The upper half of the last page of the last section had been torn away. He had no memory of tearing it himself.

The columns of print remaining on the lower halves of the torn page gave no indication of what the upper halves had contained. But the missing half-sheet tantalized him, jabbed at his memory and left him infuriated when he pulled a blank.

Doggedly he started in again. The same items he had read a hundred times he read again: Hitler making an international crisis with his demand for the Polish Corridor; a child with a pin in her throat being flown madly from Los Angeles to Johns Hopkins surgeons in Baltimore and the flyer was the kid's big brother; the champion had dropped the contender in the first round; the American members of the demobilized Abraham Lincoln Battalion had returned from Spain; Big Business was openly hiring robust young scabs to deliver milk and break up the milk strikes throughout the country. . . .

Those were the big stories, the flashes, the scoops. He studied the personal columns, the classified ads, even the markets. And always there was that missing half-sheet taunting him. But he kept on studying. There was nothing else to do.

Then he found it. He had read it before and it had meant nothing. But now the turnkey's mention of that name had given it a significance.

It was on the back page of the first section, an obscure half column near the bottom. It said in effect that a bank in the Bronx had been broken into, the vaults blasted and a young night watchman abducted.

The night watchman had been found lying in a gutter in Brooklyn badly beaten up, hardly recognizable. In the hospital, he had been unable or afraid to identify his assailants.

It was tacitly implied that this job resembled other jobs done in the old days by Sam Benelli's mob before Benelli gave up the rough stuff to go in for big-time organization; before he became an enigmatic character who seemed to be tops in the rackets, but who claimed he did nothing more now than indulge in a little betting—and who made his alibis stick.

The last line conventionally stated that Sam Benelli and his lieutenant, Joe Kehawkin, had been interrogated as a matter of routine but that as usual their alibis held plenty of water.

JOHN Smith put the paper down. He rested his head between the palms of his hands trying to think. It didn't work. All he knew for certain was that something inside him was howling a protest at his being associated with Benelli and Kehawkin.

He inferred from the paper that Benelli was powerful. Anyone associated with him would automatically be in the big time. He had been aware of the respect conferred on him by the turnkey.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Benelli was definitely not legitimate. He was out of line with the law. And something within John Smith reacted in violent opposition to being out of line with the law, no matter how much power and affluence seemed to be entailed, and no matter what had been his position before.

He remembered one of his first impulses on the street had been to avoid that cop and the mailed fist of the law the cop represented. He wondered whether that impulse had been a hangover of past disinclinations and fears of the police.

He got up, walked over to the dirty wash basin, ducked his face in the water and wiped it with the soiled towel. His thoughts were bitter, ironic.

He'd probably had a soft touch, a snap job that included plenty of dough and comparatively little risk of having to take the rap himself if anything went wrong. He'd had all that, was most likely content with it and—*bango*—something happened and now he had soured on it, didn't want it to reach out and touch him.

There were no windows in the cell. It was good to be warm. He wondered whether it was snowing now. And what he'd say to Joe Kehawkin when Kehawkin came for him.

He thought of the young night watchman, so badly beaten, unable to identify the man or men who had forced their way into the Bronx bank. He thought of vaults dynamited, the explosion and almost simultaneous concussion that occur even with the most careful muffling.

His thoughts dwelt on that blast and instinctively his hand strayed to his head, gently massaged the ache in the temple and over the right ear . . . and he wondered.

But most of all, recurrently, persistently, strangely, his thoughts kept returning to the expression on that cop's face when the cop sprawled in the gutter. . . .

He called to the cell on his left to find out what time it was and after shouts from several inmates had buffeted from cell to cell the answer came back that it was five minutes to nine.

About fifteen minutes later a new turnkey stopped in front of his cell and after inquiring gruffly, "John Smith?" which elicited a nod, unlocked the door and said: "Okay. You're sprung. Folla me."

CHAPTER III

NOBODY SMILED

IN the squad room a day sergeant was at the desk. He glanced at John Smith, turned the pages of his book, said:

"Your bail's been posted by this gent. We don't have any effects listed to turn over to you. You can report to courtroom number six in the building across the street at ten o'clock for a hearing. Or pay your fine. If you don't show up you forfeit your bail. That's all. You can go."

John Smith walked over to the man who stood grinning at him in the doorway.

"You sure must have had a comfortable night, fella," the man said. "You look like a bad accident."

"It's no picnic spending the night in a dump like this," John Smith said. "Where do we go now?"

He tried to speak casually, so that if he knew the man it would sound all right, and if he didn't know him it would sound all right too. He hadn't expected Joe Kehawkin, first lieutenant to Sam Benelli, to look like this.

"I got a taxi waiting. What with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one thing and another how'd you like to get cleaned up? You need it."

The man was short and on the plump side. But most of his body was hard-packed under his suit and he looked prosperous. He had no eyebrows at all but his cheeks were rosy. He had the coldest, palest blue eyes John Smith had ever seen. Only when he grinned did they warm with a bright blue alertness.

"I guess I could stand a shave." John Smith rubbed the stubble of his cheeks and chin.

"That suit don't need to be pressed," the man observed. "It's gotta be bent."

The taxi was waiting outside; the driver leaned back and opened the door. John Smith stooped to get in, then straightened up.

"Listen, I'd better tell you. I haven't any money. Not even enough for the shave."

"That's a gag, honey. Quit it."

"It's no gag."

The man grinned but this time his eyes remained coldly pale.

"But you know where to get it—plenty of it, don't you?" His plump hard-packed little body swayed forward a bit and he looked up at John Smith in shrewd appraisal. "Or don't you?"

"No."

The man stuck his tongue in his cheek. His breath made smoke on the frosty air. Then he said, "Okay. Okay for now." He took out his wallet and placed three ten-dollar bills in John Smith's hand.

"Until later," he said amiably. "You can return it when you—when you feel like remembering your dough."

John Smith stuck his head in the cab, came to a dead stop in an awkward position and drew a sharp breath. In the far corner of the seat he saw two sheer-stockinged ankles move, two slender slippered feet come close together to make room for him.

His gaze traveled upward. She had on a gray coat of Persian lamb which looked expensive without flashing the cost. Her gray felt hat was in her lap and her blue-black hair appeared to have been arranged with exceptional care and uncommon talent, though not made intentionally noticeable.

Ordinarily, he thought, her blue eyes would have been flecked with the bright light of keen sensitivity and appreciation of fine things; but now they were on his face, wide with consternation and something else that unaccountably quickened the pulse in his bruised wrists, made his heart hammer rapidly then slow down.

Impetuously her hand flew out and her fingertips moved fleetingly to touch his left eye, his nose, his chapped cut lips.

"You're hurt," she said in a voice that was clear and very fine although the words seemed wrenched from her throat. She put her hand on his arm, tugged gently. "Please sit down. Please."

The man on the sidewalk stamped his feet and said, "Get in. It's cold out here."

John Smith sat down beside her and the man climbed in and said to the driver, "The Belvedere." He twisted his head and looked through the back window. "And hurry it," he added.

The girl sat a little forward so that she could turn and look at John Smith. She seemed to be anxiously searching his face. Uncomfortably he was reminded of his beard which had thickened and of his entire appearance. The girl said:

"You're hurt . . . hurt badly, aren't you?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HE looked at her, not knowing quite what to say. Just looking at her was enough to get a man off his guard. In this gray outfit she excited him. But he knew she'd excite him in any outfit. It was difficult to imagine whether he knew her well.

Impatient in her anxiety she said:

"Answer me. Is it very bad? And how . . . ?"

Without looking at her he said, "Not so bad now. It's worn off a lot."

She didn't believe him but she sat back beside him and stared at the back of the driver's head. The tick of the meter and the slap of the chains against the fenders were the only sounds. Outside the snow had stopped falling and has laid a hard brilliant crust over everything and it was brittle cold with the kind of cold that is invigorating.

John Smith's thoughts were more bitter than before. It would work out like this. If she were part of the Benelli organization, then she part of that past existence he wanted to sever from this new phase of the present.

He stole an oblique glance at her, found her looking directly, searchingly at himself, and averted his eyes quickly. No, she couldn't be a part of anything to do with Benelli; no one who had the air she had or looked as she looked.

And if she weren't, then he couldn't tell her of his own connection, for most likely he had never confided it to her before. You didn't tell a girl like this things that weren't strictly on the up and up.

The man beside him said:

"Look at that meter. I can't believe it."

The meter was in the process of registering forty-five cents.

"We been hunting in all kinds of hotels and plenty of precinct stations for you—and that meter says forty-five cents. Boy, that's one thing I like about this Baltimore. Cheap taxis. Here you can ride the distance from Brooklyn to the Bronx for forty-five cents."

John Smith looked soberly ahead.

"Brooklyn . . . is in New York," he announced suddenly as if he had delved into a little-known subject and brought it to light.

The man looked at him and grinned in lavish surprise.

"Is that so?" His cold eyes twinkled. "So's Radio City and the Statue of Liberty. You sure get around."

John Smith flushed. It was an effort for him to bring out of his memory prosaic little things that others took for granted. When he accomplished it he felt proud, forgetting his small triumphs were enigmatic to others. Now he felt uncomfortable.

He felt the girl's concentrated gaze on his face again. She put her hand on his arm.

"Look at me," she said softly.

He looked at her.

"Your eye," she said. There was a breathlessness in her voice.

"It just looks bad," he explained. "It'll go away in—"

"No. Your other eye. Your good eye."

He looked at her intently, frowning. Trust her to sense something was wrong. That was the kind she was. He said slowly:

"What's the matter with it?"

"You're looking at me as if you'd never seen me before. As if—" Her voice stumbled a little, "—as if you didn't know me. . . . Or didn't want to."

He didn't answer. The man on his right hunched himself against the window, tried to make himself as incon-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spicuous as possible. Hardly audible, the girl's voice said:

"What's happened to you, honey? Besides the — that terrible thing — what's happened to you? You can tell me, honey."

DISAPPOINTMENT suddenly stirred within him. It wasn't the mention of "that terrible thing" which she implied had happened. For some reason nothing at this moment seemed as important to him as this girl herself. He rebuked himself but it was like that. It was exactly like that.

And what bothered him was inconsequential. It was her calling him "honey." It jarred. It was incongruous. It had the hard tang of a girl who knew her way around, who might have called Sam Benelli honey, or been called it herself. It was as if, thirsty, he had come upon a clear spring, looked in and found a dead toad. It was as if he had addressed her as "toots".

He looked at her and again he couldn't answer directly. Under the worried scrutiny of her gaze he grew uncomfortable, sensitive.

"What is it, honey?" she repeated softly.

"Nothing," he said, feeling he was blurting it. "Nothing's wrong. Nothing's happened"

She looked, suddenly, as if he had hit her in the mouth with his fist.

"You mean that you consider what happened the night before last . . . nothing?" Her eyes seemed to beg him.

"What," he said helplessly, "do you think?"

The anxiety in her gaze was abruptly filmed. Her voice was still clear but there was a coldly contemptuous ring to it.

"I think," she said slowly, "that you are despicable. There's nothing lower than—than what you are." She withdrew her hand from his arm, sat back in her seat. She turned her head away, looking out the window.

Sunk, he thought. She's concerned about what's happened to my face; she knows I've done something that brands me despicable—and she hasn't even mentioned my first name!

Preplexed, he went back to looking out the window. Abruptly he said, "Driver, stop the cab."

The taxi slid a bit on the hard snow, then stopped. John Smith reached across the man on his right and twisted the door handle. The man put his fingers on John Smith's wrists and squeezed, his eyes becoming pale and hard.

"Where you going? You thinking about leaving?"

"There's a newsstand on the corner. I want a paper. You can come with me if you wish."

"Sure I wish. I'll get out first."

He got out and waited for John Smith. His eyes were amused. He said laconically, "'If *you wish*'. You talk like they say you do."

THEY walked up to the newsstand which had large uneven letters scrawled across a flimsy awning top: *Out-of-Town Papers A Regular Service.*

The short man stood with one hand inside his overcoat pocket. He said, "Here's the newsstand. Buy your paper and let's get out of the cold." For a split second he glanced down the street the way they had come. "And don't take any longer than you have to."

John Smith looked at the crotchety little man behind the stand.

"Have you got a December twenty-second New York *Times?*"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old man was stamping to keep himself warm. His neck was swathed in a huge faded-red muffler. He said, "Sure, sure. That's just two days old. 'Course I got it. I hold 'em at least five days. That'll be a dime." He fished under a pile of papers, examined one and handed it across the stand.

John Smith said, "Have you a dime? I only have the three tens you loaned me."

The short man wrinkled the skin of his forehead where his eyebrows should have been. He grinned. "Okay. So I'll pay for it."

While he was paying, John Smith turned quickly to the back page. He stared at it, frowned. The upper half of the page that was missing from his copy was a huge picture of the first Trans-Atlantic Flight. It showed nothing but a plane winging its way above the ocean into the whiteness of the sky. The plane was a distant speck in a great expanse of sky and in the foreground small groups of spectators and photographers watched it go.

He turned over the page, swore softly.

It was another picture. The caption proclaimed it the first shot of the demobilized Abraham Lincoln Battalion returning from Spain. It showed them coming down the gangplank on their way to the Customs House.

There were fourteen or fifteen of them. Some walked on crutches; one of them was being rolled in a wheelchair by a comrade. None of them was smiling. Quite a few had their heads bandaged, and two of them had their faces covered with gauze and were being led. One man was shielding his face from the camera with his arms.

None of them looked very proud. Just tired, with aching mouths and eyes, and a fear of what would happen to them because of their illegal exit and entry of the United States.

Not one had on any semblance of a uniform and, in spite of the ice- and snow-lined rail of the gangplank, they had no overcoats and their civilian suits were shabby.

Joe Smith studied the picture quickly, conscious of a welling disappointment. This hadn't advanced him any. He had counted on the missing half-sheet. He threw the paper back on the stand. "You can have it," he said to the old man.

"Looking to see whether you were missed?" the short man said as they walked back to the cab. "Hell, honey, they don't even know you're gone. Lucky for you. Or maybe smart for you."

John Smith had an impulse to take a chance and confide in the short man. But there was something prohibitive in the hardness of the pale eyes, the way the right hand stayed inside the coat pocket.

CHAPTER IV

LOOK AT MY FACE

FOR a brief instant the girl's eyes swept his face as he got in beside her, then she turned her head to the window. They drove on and the snow began coming down very hard and then suddenly let up. The plump man kept turning his face to look out the rear window.

Finally the cab skidded to a halt and the plump man said.

"Out we go. We're here."

They got out on the pavement in front of an imposing building of grey stone and red brick. Letters of unlit bulbs over the marquee spelled out *Hotel Belvedere.*

John Smith shivered uncontrollably

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the girl said, "Where's your overcoat?"

"I've lost it. Stupid of me."

She shrugged. "You've plenty of money to buy another." Her voice as well as her eyes were coldly impersonal.

The short man had paid the driver and was standing on the curb, looking down the street.

"I think," he said calmly, "somebody has tailed us." His eyebrowless forehead crinkled and his pale eyes glinted. "And that generally makes it complicated, being tailed. A cab followed us out. Passed by the intersection down the street. Maybe I'm screwy. Let's get inside. It's cold."

Abruptly the girl walked up to the plumb man. She looked at him levelly.

"I've decided there's no use going on," she said succinctly. "We're finished. It's over." She turned to John Smith. The blueness of her eyes was the blueness of the cold clear ice that clung to frozen rainspouts along the edge of the pavement. "That way will be more convenient for you, I'm sure."

He looked at her. It was going to be difficult to separate from those blue eyes and warm black hair. But he was treading on a thin crust and could sink through at any moment. He could utter six insipid words, "I don't know who I am," and give them a complete advantage, or he could remain ambiguous and unresponsive and grope blindly but steadily forward.

If the man on his right were Kehawkin, and the girl associated with Benelli in some way, it would be senseless to mention his condition. All their cryptic reference to the money he was supposed to have access to. . . . People become ugly when they believe you are lying about money.

He kept thinking of the night watchman and the dynamited bank vault.

And yet, if these two were his friends, why hadn't they made any overtures to him, or imparted the little confidences that friends always share on meeting? Or at least called him by name.

"You see," the girl said, "you haven't any answers—or won't give them. You want to go back to them, don't you? We know they're here in town. Naturally they'd be where you are. You're satisfied with what you've done, satisfied to be with them. Aren't you?"

The plump man said quietly to her: "Look, it's awful cold out here. Let's go in where it's warm and private. I wouldn't be too hasty with this decision—"

"No. Can't you see? We're not wanted. He's content with what he's done. He ran away, naturally. But he wasn't glad to see us. He wasn't even surprised. He's given no explanation. We're not to be trusted now. He has money, if he can make himself touch it. He has them—all of them. They've come to meet him in this city. And he has—"

She hesitated a second. "He has her. He has Babe. That's obviously what he wants. And it lets us out. And we're getting out."

She moved away, stopped, and said low-voiced, "I was willing to stick by you, honey. Even after what you did. I'd have shared it with you—the trouble. But you don't want me and now I can tell you: I wouldn't become tangled up in it for anything in the world!" She walked to the curb.

JOHN SMITH made no move to stop her. All this had served only to make his head start aching badly again. Keep his mouth shut. That was it. Let others draws inferences and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make the moves until this blank in his brain regained solidity, clarity. He stood shivering and hunching his shoulders in the cold.

The girl said to the plump man, "Will you call me a cab, Mr. Sylvester?"

And that did it. The plump man wasn't Kehawkin.

It was the first inkling of information either of them had let fall since John Smith met them. At least the man might not be a part of Benelli's outfit, and at this moment that fact seemed vital.

He made his frozen limbs work; he stood by the girl.

"Listen," he said, and it was the first note of any emotion that had entered his voice. "Can't we go inside and—perhaps things might clear up a little. I guess there are a lot of things to say, maybe explain. . . ."

She looked at him. He was such a big guy, and for all the breadth of his shoulders they didn't offer much resistance to the vind. His unshaven face, his cut and half-closed eye, his tight, drawn expression: he looked exactly what he was—a fugitive. Her tone relented a little.

"It was pointless for me to keep you out here, freezing. We'd better go in. The lobby, at least."

"And in a hurry," the short man said. He was looking down toward the street intersection again.

Inside, John Smith was conscious of the raised eyebrows of the lobby-sitters as they took in his appearance. The plump man shook himself, sighed.

"That's better. Don't see how you stood it. Look. Maybe you hustle into the barber shop and get shaved and some warm towels on your face and it'll make you feel better all around. Then we can talk good."

John Smith nodded, watching the girl to see if her attitude toward him had softened any. Sylvester said:

"While you're getting your face manicured I'll get a room. A room where maybe nobody'll find us and we won't be"—he shot a hard, oblique glance at John Smith—"bothered."

The two men walked toward the head of a marble flight of steps where a small sign said *Barber Shop in Basement.*

"Look," the plump man said, "I been kinda dumb not introducing myself. But it seems like a guy don't need an introduction to you, Mr. Corbin. My name's Sylvester. Amos Sylvester."

He flicked his hand out of his coat pocket and there was a small silver badge in his palm that said: *Sylvester Private Bureau of Detectives.*

John Smith couldn't say anything at that moment. His brain was trying to register three things simultaneously. His own name was Corbin! Corbin, Corbin, Corbin! It struck a responsive chord in him somewhere, but trying to place the melody of that chord was like butting his head against concrete.

Somewhere, out of the remote or recent past that name was trying to touch him, associate itself. But he wasn't getting the contact.

And why should Sylvester feel he needed no introduction? Why were a detective and a girl following him around Baltimore, and who had Sylvester suspected was tailing them? The girl had accused him of wanting to go back to "them." Who was Babe? And for the sake of Heaven where and what was this money which. . . .

But before he laid himself wide open and deluged them with questions, he'd better let Sylvester and the girl answer a few of their own volition. . . .

The barber said, "A shave, sir, nat-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

urally? Perhaps hot towels and a facial massage?"

He nodded. "The works."

And when the heat from the towel which gently swathed his face seemed to penetrate warmly, soothingly to his spinning brain, he allowed himself to drift off into a dozing abeyance in which, for the moment, there was no ruction, no nightmare of confusion, but only peace and a great, consoling warmth. . . .

IN THE lobby the girl was waiting for him. "Mr. Sylvester's having some trouble getting a room," she said, her eyes surveying his clean-shaven face, his combed hair.

He had had a glance at his new face in the barber shop mirror. He looked a hundred percent improved since the black shabbiness of his beard had been removed. His eye and lips and nose weren't so bad now, and the hot and cold towels had brought color into his face.

It was a strong face; he had been impressed with its strength; it had seemed in keeping with his shoulders. He waited anxiously for the girl to complete her appraisal of him, waited for some comment.

Her eyes seemed to soften and her lips parted to say something and then Amos Sylvester was standing beside them and her lips closed.

"This joint's filled up with holiday," Sylvester explained. "Got to wait a few minutes. They said at the desk they might be able to break up one of the suites and give us a room."

He glanced at one of the doors leading off the lobby into the taproom. Music and the sporadic bursts of voices talking, laughing, singing, came through the door.

"We'll go in there while we're waiting," Sylvester said. "No use standing around waiting for somebody to find us."

They found an empty booth and Sylvester ordered three beers. Some drunks, collected at the bar, were lustily singing *Jingle Bells.*

Sylvester looked squarely at John Smith.

"The way you been acting, I don't guess it'll do much good to ask whether they been following you or whether you're gonna meet them because you want to."

John Smith tasted his beer. He knew, suddenly, that he was going to talk to this girl, going to spill the entire works, let her know he didn't have the faintest idea who he was or had been, what he'd done, or who she was.

Instinctively he knew she was for him, if he wanted her, and could be trusted. But it was different with this apparently genial detective. If he could talk to the girl alone. . . .

"Who do you mean by 'they'?" he asked.

Sylvester's laugh was dry.

"Okay. Okay. You don't want to give. It ain't my job to force you"—he glanced at the girl—"yet."

"You don't want me to meet them, do you?" John Smith asked the girl.

She kept her eyes on her beer mug.

"There's Babe, of course," she said simply. Her tone was listless.

Sylvester got up.

"Gonna see if we can have that room." He walked hurriedly away.

John Smith nodded after him.

"Did he have to put out much dough to square that cop I hit?"

She was puzzled. "He didn't square any cop. We understood you were in there for being drunk and disorderly—celebrating. We didn't arrive in Baltimore until early this morning. After

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we found you he went in and posted your bail. That's all."

THE muscles on the knobs of his jaw stood out. Then it *was* Kehawkin who had come to the jail during the night. He said abruptly:

"It's Benelli and his mob you're afraid I'm meeting, isn't it?"

She looked up at him and suddenly the sturdy dam that had keep her emotions in restraint, gave way.

"You know it is!" It was almost as if she were crying softly. "How could you have done it, honey? You're not—weren't—that kind. When I walked in your room and saw you with her—I knew then what you were thinking of doing.

"You've always played things so straight, so very honest, so fine. And I was so utterly proud."

Under her coat her breast moved with her quick breathing. She looked straight into him with her blue fathoming eyes.

"How could you have mixed yourself up with Sam Benelli, knowing what he was and what he wanted of you? How could . . ."

She broke off, her voice muted by an anguish that closed her eyes as she turned her head. Her words came again, dull, hurt: "How could you go through with it? How *did* you? Was it just the money, or—Babe?"

She turned to him. "It's such a terrible thing you've done. Not only the dishonesty, but cutting off the faith that was placed in you. . . . Your future's gone. When they catch you they'll send you to jail. . . ."

The singing voices reached a maudlin crescendo.

". . . jingle all the wa-ay-y . . ."

She cried very softly into her hands. He fought down the hotness in his throat, tried to stave off the sharp ache that came into his temples whenever he had any thinking to do. He took a deep breath and said:

"Look at me."

She lifted her face.

"Tell me," he said quietly. "What is your name?"

"What is my . . ." She kept looking at him, levelly, but a lump came into her throat and she had a difficult time swallowing. Her voice was bitter. "Has it changed you so much that you can be cruel too?"

He was still holding his breath, letting his words come over it from the roof of his mouth, tautly.

"I mean it. Can't you see I mean it? What is your name?" He let out his breath and said very slowly, "What is *my* name?"

The blue eyes didn't waver from his. But they were hurt. The mouth was hurt too.

"All right, honey. This is the game you're playing. It's a callous little game. But it's yours. This is your way of telling me that you don't know me any longer, that you don't know you and me—together. I should have known you had chosen her, and them, along with the money which never really mattered. I won't interfere. I never did. I won't now. Only please let me go. Quickly."

She made a move to rise. He caught her by the shoulders, held her down. The group at the bar went on raucously:

"Oh-h what fun it is to run-n-n . . ."

"LISTEN to me!" His voice was rough with urgency. "For God's sake can't you see I'm being as straight with you as I know how? Haven't you known me well enough before to know when I'm sincere? I'm asking you who

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you are, who I am—because I don't know! Can't you understand that? *I don't know!*"

He shook her without realizing the power in his great clenched hands until he saw her wince, her face go white. He released her.

"This isn't a game! It's the damnedest thing that could happen to a man. It's my head. Something's happened to it. It's a blank, a void. I can't get any farther back than a certain point. I can't. . . ."

He stopped. She was watching him intently. And then, slowly, a comprehension seemed to unveil the bewildered hurt in her eyes. Her quick belief was aided by a desperate wanting to believe. Her hand reached out to touch his big fist.

"You mean. . . ?"

"I mean the first time I ever saw you, to my knowledge, was when I entered that taxi!"

"Dear God," she said softly. "The look in your eyes in the taxi, dull, not knowing me; the way you acted; we were strangers." She drew in her breath. "Tell me in heaven's name what's happened. Are you hurt badly?"

He told her. He didn't know whether he was hurt badly or not. He thought not, except when the pain struck. He let his words fall in the order of his jumbled thoughts.

He told her from the beginning. His words were hoarse and excited and at last he had the satisfaction of seeing gentleness and sympathy supersede the pain and hurt on her mouth, in her eyes.

She was crying quietly and there was almost a vital relief in the way she cried.

Finally, when the words stopped tumbling from him and he sat breathing heavily and watching her, imperious to the singing at the bar, she said:

"Darling. My poor darling." And then she said, "Before I try to explain, we must see a doctor immediately. You and I know nothing of these things of the brain. Your head—finding out and comprehending suddenly might be too much—"

"For God's sake don't tantalize me. Tell me who I am, what I've done!"

She put out her hand and her fingertips pressed soothingly against his temple. There was a deep worry in her eyes.

"Please don't excite yourself. Your health is more important than anything else in the world to me. I'll tell you anything and everything if you think it best, honey."

"Don't call me that . . . unless you mean it." Bafflement and the consciousness of her anxious concern which made her treat him as a governess treats a sensitive child, turned his excitement into harsh fury. "It makes you sound cheap and hard, calling me that. You're not cheap and hard."

She said gently, "Poor darling, you can't understand. It's just—" And then her eyes raised in alarm above his head and she said with a small gasp: "What's the matter? What's happened?"

Sylvester said, "Plenty."

HIS voice was breathless as if he'd come running to the booth. His eyes were colder and harder than John Smith thought they could be. "Plenty's happened. They're here. They were coming into the lobby as I came in here. I told you we were followed. They're here all right."

The girl gave a soft cry, her hands clasping John Smith's big left arm in a gesture of instinctive protection.

"Amos," she said, her eyes indicating John Smith, "we've got to do some-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing quickly; but we can't have any excitement. He doesn't even know who he—"

"We'll do something quick all right," Sylvester interrupted, his eyes swinging to search the doorway that led into the lobby. "Or there'll be plenty of excitement. Here, Mr. Corbin."

He pressed a key attached to a small wooden tag into John Smith's hand. "That's the key to the room I just got. It's on the twelth floor, room 1207. Come on, honey. Move."

John Smith stood up. The girl said, "Amos, what are you going to do?"

"Plenty. And you're going to do it with me. The elevator bank is just outside this door. If you and me walk up to the lobby desk like we got no worries in the world, those gents'll be so interested to see us that they won't notice Mr. Corbin slipping out this door to the elevator and going up to the room. They won't know we even got a room and we can tell 'em we never was with a third party or that the third party had skipped. But we got to get going on the hop."

Sylvester left some change on the table and they walked to the doorway. He instructed John Smith, low-voiced, to watch him until he took off his hat and use that for his signal to leave.

"Stay in the room until we get rid of the visitors and come up."

The girl flashed a quick reassuring smile. "I'll tell you then," she said softly.

John Smith nodded. They were trying to help him; he was certain of that. Why a private detective was with her he couldn't think, but there must be a good reason. For the present he must submerge any initiative of his own and take orders from them.

He wondered why the girl had been so genuinely hesitant in telling him who he was, trying to protect him from what she thought was going to be a shock.

He watched her boy-like figure in the grey coat and Sylvester's stumpy little form stroll across the lobby to the desk. The desk was semicircular around a marble pillar and he couldn't see who was on the other side of the pillar.

A heavy hand pounded on his shoulder and a thick voice said, "Well look who's here!"

HE SWUNG around quickly. One of the singing drunks had detached himself from the group at the bar and was wobbling unsteadily in front of him. The drunk's face was fat and red and his expression was unpleasant.

"What you doin' here?" he said. "'Fraid to go back N'York?"

"You know me?"

The drunk grinned and it widened into a loud unpleasant laugh. He twisted his face around to the others at the bar.

"Hey, Eddie, Frank, Walt. He wan's know if I *know* him. This crook wan's know if *I* know him. Eddie, tell this lousy rack'teer how good I know him."

Eddie took his right foot off the rail, tottered around and leaned his back against the bar. He was frowning. He glanced apprehensively at John Smith and then said to the fat drunk:

"Harry, c'mon back here." His attempt at an apologetic smile to John Smith didn't come off.

John Smith said quietly, "Who do you think I am, Harry?"

"I *know* who you are . . . lousy rack'teer . . . Don't try bluff me. So you run to this town, stinkin' up Bal'more. Look, I wash at the same collesh too—ten-twelve yearsh before you. 'Shamed of it now. Never thought share the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same alma mater with a mobster. . . ."

People in the taproom were beginning to stare. John Smith glanced over his shoulder. Amos Sylvester had taken off his hat. John Smith said quickly, "See you later, Harry," and went through the door, headed for the elevator bank down the corridor.

He got out on the twelfth floor and searched the corridors until he found 1207. The room was larger and more luxuriant than average. He locked the door, left the key in the lock and lay down gingerly on the bed.

His head seemed to pain him less when he was on the flat of his back, and he wanted his head clear of pain. He wanted to think. He wanted to extricate snatches of incidents, names, places, people, out of what little cosmos existed in his jumbled brain.

The voice of the drunk downstairs kept re-echoing in his head.

"Rack'teer. Mobster . . ."

He should have remained and probed the drunk for information regardless of the girl and Sylvester. The drunk would undoubtedly have gushed some sort of clue. But the drunk was loud and attracting attention. Remaining there would have jeopardized the girl's position out in the lobby with whomever she and Sylvester were meeting.

Just the same . . . Mobster. Racketeer. The words had more than an ugly sound; they went home. He knew instinctively that they were applicable to him. No matter how he felt now, the brand of those words had been on him before, deservedly. That was the worst of it—he'd deserved it. And now he knew it.

Somebody Corbin—racketeer. Maybe—he remembered the expression on that cop's face and he knew by now the strength that was in his own body—maybe he had been detailed to the strongarm squad of the mob. That meant he could have a few private murders tacked on to his previous account and perhaps no one the wiser.

No one, that was, except the members of the racket: men like Sam Benelli and Joe Kehawkin. They'd know for sure. And there wasn't anything they couldn't hold over his head—men like that—if they found out the condition he'd got himself into.

Somebody Corbin . . . killer. Maybe triggerman for the racket. It was funny how your mind could magnify a dreaded thing until you believed it. No wonder he'd had that instinct to avoid the police.

He got up from the bed, went over to the window and stared across the white-topped roofs of the city.

Corbin. Corbin! The name was familiar. It meant more than if someone had addressed him as Thompson or Baxter or Skinner. It aroused tantalizingly responsive strings in his memory, strings which were still too tenuous and feeble and which broke each time he tried to pull his mind open with them. Corbin . . .

THERE was a gentle rapping on the locked door and he turned away from the window and stood still.

The rapping came again. He moved to the door and said quietly, "Who's there?"

"House boy, sir. Towels for you, sir." The voice was young, genial.

"I don't want any. I'm not spending the night. If I want any service I'll ring."

"Yes, sir." There was a pause but he could tell the boy hadn't moved.

"You can go. I told you I don't need anything."

"Yes, sir. But there's a lady here, sir. She said you're expecting—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why didn't you say so?" In his haste he fumbled with the key in the lock. If the girl were here by herself it meant Sylvester was still getting rid of the visitors, and he'd have a chance to talk to her, listen to her. He turned the key.

The door opened and it was a girl. But it wasn't *the* girl. He'd never seen this one before.

She said, "Hello, honey," quickly closed the door, locked it and took the key and slipped it down the neck of her dress.

She moved toward the one chair in the room, slipping out of her black caracul coat and throwing it and her hat on the chair. Her dress was a dark shiny blue which moved liquidly over the firmness of her small body.

She sat down on the edge of the bed, crossing her slim legs, took a cigarette out of a small blue bag, lit it and exhaled the smoke with keen appreciation.

"Sit down," she invited. She tousled her blonde hair, swept a lock of it from one eye and smiled at him. He didn't like her eyes; they were hazel but they weren't clear hazel and they weren't candid eyes even though they looked directly at him.

She was beautiful with that hard beauty which demands much on the basis of previous conquests.

"Sit down, honey. Or am I still poison and why?"

He didn't sit down. He moved toward her, stood over her, looked down at the small Dresden-cut features which tilted up to his. Something in his manner made her move uneasily.

"Look, honey, you're not going to get rough?"

This girl could use the word honey. She could get away with it.

"You're Babe."

One of her pale eyebrows went up in quizzical derision. Her smile was thin, hard.

"Sherlock, you're a killer-diller. Did you figure that out all by your great big lonesome? You sound like you're taking your first gander at me. Is this another gagaroo? The last one you pulled didn't turn out so healthy—for you. Remember?"

"How did you get here?"

"Or maybe you and your social-register brunette downstairs fixed this up between you. And that's too bad. I'd hate to break up anything between you and Blue Book Ellen Hammond . . . again. Remember how startled she was the first time when she walked in?"

She looked up at him and gave a chiding laugh. "Yes, I'd hate to break it up again. Or would I? Even with your face messed up you're not so hard to take. And with that two hundred grand you're pretty easy to take."

For a moment he was listening. He was hearing that name. It was singing in his head. Ellen Hammond. It didn't mean anything, except that it was *her* name.

THE blond uncrossed her legs and stood up, letting the cigarette fall to the rug and grinding it out with one of the spiked heels of her slippers. She faced him. She smiled and moved forward, standing very close.

"Listen, honey, listen." Her voice dropped to an inviting huskiness. "Maybe I don't blame you for lamming out of the racket with two hundred grand. Maybe you've got the right idea and I'm just catching on."

He was trying to place her. He couldn't.

"You don't want to waste that kind of dough on a dame like Hammond, honey. We walked in on her talking to a fatty in the lobby. The boys are hold-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing a little conversation with them till I make sure what goes on up here.

"Is the fatty her friend or yours? Not yours, I don't guess. He ought to wear a sign on his pot belly. He's got copper printed on him everywhere else. What's she doing with a copper, honey? Trying to sink her nails into some of that two hundred grand?"

He didn't answer. Just looked. She was worth looking at. Hard, but worth looking at. He couldn't place her.

Her lids dropped, the pale lashes half concealing her eyes. She parted her lips, letting them become full and sensuous.

"I wouldn't do a thing like that, honey. I wouldn't be like her."

She stood on tiptoe and let her arms go up about his neck. Beneath his chest he could feel the warm resilience of her breasts, the steady, deliberate beat of her heart. Her mouth lifted and pressed softly against his shoulder and she spoke, her words muffled:

"Honey, I'm not kidding. I'm on the level like I was before, like in New York. I didn't go for you just because Sam put me up to it. I'm not a fall guy. I've got initiative and brains of my own. I'm a looker.

"You wouldn't get tired of me. And God knows I'm tired of that close-fisted ape Sam. We could get out of here before they come up. They're waiting for me to call. And you could get the money and we'd skip together.

"They wouldn't find us and they'd do the same thing to us if they got the chance. I know how to hide from Sam. I know how to hide from the racket. . . ."

Her voice trailed off, leaving the sound of her warm quick breathing. She knew how to excite a man.

He pushed her away, roughly.

"Give me the key. You're getting out of here."

She backed away, her eyes clouding in anger, her lips thin.

"You're going to be a yap after all. You want all of it for yourself. You wouldn't split with your own mother. Sam was right. He said you were blowing, leaving us without even an empty bag to hold. You should have known better, honey. You should have known better."

CHAPTER VI

NOW GIVE!

SHE turned, picked up the room phone from its table, said, "Desk? Tell the guests for 1207 they can come up now." She pronged the phone, laughed loudly.

"You don't use your head, honey. You didn't use it when you double-crossed Sam and walked out with the dough. You didn't use it when you listened to the bellboy and let me in." She took a cigarette and lighter from her bag, flicked the lighter. Her voice, coming around the cigarette, was harsh.

"Two hundred thousand bucks, and you don't use your head! What a break for me I didn't get tied up with you before I found out what a yap you are."

She moved to the door, her hand reaching down the neck of her dress for the key. She bent over the door, inserting the key in the lock, turning it.

He watched her, unable to move. Somewhere in his possession but not in his knowledge, he had two hundred thousand dollars. The sum rang in his head, made it ache again. No wonder Sylvester had been skeptical loaning him thirty dollars.

The girl placed her back to the door, leaned against it, smiled deprecatingly.

"And now they're coming up here for their dough and you'll have to turn

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it over. And after the way you lammed, Sam won't give you your cut. You've been a yap, honey, a yap."

He heard the elevator doors down the corridor open and close. There were sounds of feet shushing through the thick carpet. Babe was looking at him. Her attitude was strange.

"Listen," she said softly. "One more chance. Tell me where you've got it and I'll see you get out of this and we can connect later. Almost a quarter of a million bucks."

Her eyes grew even brighter and her full lips worked. "All my life I wanted that kind of dough. Honey, break down. Be smart." She was a little wild, a little desperately wild and strange.

He said inanely, "What makes you think I've got money like that?" and cursed silently because there wasn't anything else he could say.

Babe straightened up with a cat-like motion. "Yap," she grated, her voice bitter, disappointed. "So it's going to be like that. You'll see how smart you are. I won't be sorry."

The sound of feet came to a stop outside. The door opened without any preliminary knock and suddenly the room seemed to be crowded.

"Well," a man in a black fedora said genially. "Well, well."

Ellen Hammond and Amos Sylvester stood by the bed. The girl's level eyes were fixed on John Smith; her lips were unsteady and he sensed the fear she felt for him.

Sylvester had his hands comfortably thrust into his coat pockets and he rocked gently on his heels of his shoes. He was looking at John Smith. There was faint amusement in his speculative glance. He was wondering now that it had come to a showdown whether John Smith would acknowledge his acquaintance with the newcomers.

"WELL, well," the man in the black fedora said again. His voice was excessively genial, like a jolly man playing Santa Claus.

But there was nothing pleasant about his appearance. He was small. The complexion of his thin face was almost as dark as the fedora. His eyes were piercing black and he was a hunchback. His deformity accentuated the impression he gave of being cruel.

He held a black traveling bag which, though it was of normal size, gave the effect of dwarfing him. He didn't put it down.

"So we stand around and say nothing," he said pleasantly. "Blackie, close the door." He turned his large oblong head and his black eyes settled on John Smith and glinted.

Blackie kicked the door shut. He had small squinty blue eyes and platinum hair which was close cropped. There was a long freshly-healed cut at his left temple. It ran into his hair.

He was about six feet three and weighed more than two hundred pounds. He handled himself awkwardly, as a bull does. There was the bulge of a gun in a shoulder holster under his left arm.

After kicking the door he turned around and looked at John Smith. There was a scowl on his lips and an ugly expression in his tiny blue eyes. He kept looking intently. He didn't like John Smith.

There were two others. A stocky man with a red pock-marked face and a long jaw. He didn't wear a hat and his thinning hair was graying over his ears, but he looked very healthy. He was eyeing John Smith, frowning and looking half perplexed.

The last man was different. He was tall and thin. He was a dresser. He looked well in the expensive clothes he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wore with a casual unconcern. With easy long-legged grace he had moved over to the chair by the bathroom door, put his foot on the seat of the chair and leaned his elbow on his knee.

He was examining his fingernails, rubbing one of them with a pigskin glove. He was good-looking. He was probably over thirty-six but he could pass anywhere for twenty-nine or thirty. He wore a brown Homburg hat which he had carelessly pushed back, revealing dark brown hair that matched brown yellow-centered eyes.

There was something about him that suggested a lean majestic hawk—a hawk which hadn't eaten for days.

He flipped the pigskin gloves at his nails and then raised his head, turned it; and the yellow-centered eyes were directed in casual but bleak appraisal of John Smith.

John Smith didn't look at any of them directly. He managed to include them all in his glance without letting his eyes linger on any particular one.

It was uncomfortable being the focal point of seven pairs of eyes. Some of these men might once have been his friends, or he might have known one or two intimately; one of them may once have saved his life, or he theirs. He had no way of knowing.

The silence was beginning to weigh. They expected him to make the first move. He made his voice brittle and unconcerned.

"We seem to have reached an impasse, gentlemen. I'm sorry there aren't enough chairs to go around while we're waiting."

The hunchback laughed, a nasal, chiding sound.

"They got you tabbed right. You and your fancy six-bit words." He laughed again, shaking his shoulders, the hump twitching under his overcoat.

BABE said, "It took you guys long enough to come up after I called. But it was fun plenty. He's a pushover—for everything except giving out."

John Smith turned and looked at her. She was putting her caracul coat on. Her hair was tousled and the bright lipstick on her mouth was smudged. Her eyelids drooped as she looked at Ellen Hammond.

"Your honey's a pushover. I didn't even have to be in the blue book." Then she looked at the good-looking man. The man's eyes never left John Smith, but there was more yellow in them now and the way his thin nostrils contracted made him not quite so good-looking.

Ellen Hammond looked at Babe's hair and the smudged lipstick. Her eyes were perplexed and hurt.

John Smith was suddenly tired of waiting. Almost with relief he felt anger tugging inside his chest.

"Look. Let's come to the point. What is it you want?"

Abruptly Blackie snarled like an animal.

"Lemme take a crack at the—" He moved his hulk toward John Smith, his fists doubling up like bags of cement on the ends of his arms.

John Smith swung around to face him. Blackie stopped and his right hand passed quickly across his chest and held a pistol.

"Put the toy away, Blackie." It was the good-looker who spoke. His voice was hard without being harsh. It was used to being obeyed. He didn't look so much like a hawk when he was talking. "Don't play with toys, Blackie."

Blackie scowled. "I been playing with toys since I was a kid. I owe this doublecrossing louse something." He pushed his fingers along the cut at the side of his head. "I ain't forgot that lead pipe. And making me write that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing. Any louse that hits anybody in the head with a lead pipe—"

"Save it."

"But he's still gonna play games, Sam," Blackie pleaded. "He said let's come to the point and what did we want. What do we want!" Blackie reversed the gun in his hand, raised it. "Let me heater-whip him just once and he won't be so ignorant about the point."

"Put the gun away."

Again Blackie fingered the cut. He looked at Sam for a moment and his eyes dropped. He put the gun away.

John Smith watched Sam. Sam Benelli. He'd had an idea that big shots were stocky and florid and wore striped shirts and derby hats. Benelli held out his left hand and inspected his fingernails. Then he raised his brown yellow-centered eyes to John Smith.

"We've wasted enough time." His hard voice was quiet. His eyes nodded at the black bag in the hunchback's hand. "Want to trade now and get it over with?"

JOHN SMITH eyed the bag. It wouldn't be smart or safe to let these men know what had happened. They expected him to know something. They could get ugly if they found he didn't, regardless of his reason. He said:

"Anything mine I keep. I don't like trading."

Amos Sylvester said, "Yeah. Where did it get the Indians?"

Blackie hit Sylvester hard across the mouth with the back of his fist. "Keep your fat mouth out of this, butterball."

Sylvester shook his head sharply. There was blood on his lower lip and it puffed slightly. He grinned bleakly.

"Give me back my gun so that we both have one. Then do that again."

The hunchback said pleasantly, "Keep quiet, little man. We'll oblige you later."

The healthy-looking man stopped frowning and there was a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Come on, honey. Mr. Benelli ain't kidding. You ought to know well enough Mr. Benelli don't kid. You ain't forgetting the way Mr. Benelli don't kid, are you? Stalling won't get you anywhere. You ain't got a chance."

"Let Mr. Benelli present his proposition. I'll listen."

"Six-bit gas from him," Blackie muttered.

The healthy red-faced man raised his hands in a gesture of appeal. "Look. Be sensible. I know you never went for me. You think I sold you out. But there's got to be guys like me in our racket. I done the best I could by you. Give me a break. Right now Mr. Benelli don't like me any more than he does you. Give you and me a break, honey. Quit stalling."

The small muscles in Ellen Hammond's throat were working as she swallowed. Her eyes were on John Smith and she was very frightened and once when he glanced at her she framed the words, "Tell them, please—for your sake," with her lips.

She meant tell them what had happened to him; but he knew unhealthy eyes when he saw them and Sam Benelli and the hunchback had unhealthy eyes.

Babe gave a little derisive laugh.

"You'll never get him to give this way." She looked at Benelli. "Sweetheart, he's got two hundred thousand iron men tucked away for himself. Sweetheart, he needs persuasion."

Benelli said, "Yes," and nodded to Blackie.

In one movement Blackie had his re-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volver reversed in his hand and swung it, roundhouse, at John Smith's cheek.

John Smith rolled his head up and back quickly but the butt of the gun caught him alongside of the neck, making a quiet sound and sending a jarring pain into his eyes and head. He stumbled but regained his balance. Silence, more racking than the blow on the neck, hung on the room.

"Please don't do that again."

Ellen Hammond's voice sounded loud in the quiet. She moved around the bed and stood by John Smith as if to shield him. His fists were closed and he moved her gently aside with his arms.

"It's all right," he said. "Let him do it again."

Blackie hesitated. Ellen Hammond said, "Can't you see what's the matter with him? Can't you tell that he doesn't recognize you?" She looked around at the faces.

"Don't," John Smith said to her quickly. "That isn't the way."

She paid no attention. "He doesn't remember seeing any one of you before. He doesn't have an idea who you are. He's hurt."

CHAPTER VII

EIGHT BALL

BLACKIE raised the gun butt again. Benelli said, "Hold it," and took his foot from the chair. He came over close to the girl and inspected her, his glance starting at her dark hair and slowly running down to her legs.

"Now, beautiful. Say that again."

John Smith gave her a warning shake of his head but she ignored it. Breathing quickly she told Benelli that John Smith was hurt badly, that his memory had faded, that he hadn't recognized her, or them, and had no idea as to his own identity.

"He's hurt. You can't treat a mental injury with violence. He should be in the hospital. I can get him Harmon, the best brain specialist at Johns Hopkins. Then perhaps he can tell you what you want, give you what you want . . ."

Sam Benelli looked from the girl to John Smith. Babe said:

"What a gag. Sweetheart, you're not going to be taken in by it? They're just tearing up the combination to the vault." Losing sight of the money did unpleasant things to Babe's face. For a moment she looked savagely tired with the frustration of years that had been tough.

"Shut up, Babe," Benelli said to her quietly. Again the yellow-centered eyes fixed on John Smith. "Is it on the level about your head?" He could be good-looking even when his eyes were dangerously unhealthy. "Is it?"

John Smith nodded slowly. Take it or leave it now; whatever was coming was coming. Ellen had meant to help. It wasn't her fault. They were in the driver's seat, top-hand.

Benelli's finger indicated Blackie. "You never saw Blackie before?"

"I don't remember ever seeing him before."

"John Kehawkin?" With feline elegance the hand pointed at the hunchback.

"No."

"Babe?"

"Naturally not."

"Why naturally?"

"She said I'd been—intimate—with her before. I don't remember, but I doubt it."

"So you don't remember," Babe said. "Even she remembers that. The hotel. So we haven't been intimate?"

"Did Babe say that?" Benelli turned to Babe. "Did you tell him that?"

Babe scowled. "Who told me to work

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on him in New York?" She countered sullenly. "Anyway, it was my own business I guess."

Benelli looked at her until she lowered her head and a lock of her honey-blond hair dropped over her forehead. Benelli indicated the healthy red-faced man who had pleaded with John Smith.

"Chuck Elliot?"

"No."

The corners of Chuck Elliot's lips drooped and the light went out of his eyes leaving them damp and disappointed and cold.

"You sure? Chuck's been around with you. He's been solid."

"I'm sure."

"And me? Of course you never seen me?"

"No."

"And the fatty over there; the dick?"

"My name's Sylvester," the detective said. "It's very simple once you get on to it." He was staring at John Smith. As an afterthought he added, "Holy cripes."

"No, not before this morning when he got me out of the station."

"Can," Blackie amended sourly. "Six-bit gas."

Benelli turned and said to Kehawkin: "Why did Fatty beat you to it?"

The hunchback shifted the black bag from his right hand to his left.

"It was three in the morning, Sam. They wouldn't've let him out unless I raised a stink. I knew you didn't want a stink. We come five minutes after court had opened but he'd gone."

"Anyway," Blackie growled, "we got there soon enough to see him blow in the cab with Fatty and the dame. Now he's stalling with this disremember stuff. He don't know *me*." Blackie rubbed the butt of his gun.

Benelli nodded at Ellen Hammond.

"And her? You don't remember her either?"

"If I've ever seen her before I don't remember it."

"He doesn't even know my name," the girl said softly.

SHE watched Babe. Babe was seated in front of the mirror at the dressing table, removing the smudged lipstick from the corners of her mouth with a piece of Kleenex. She had got her tousled hair back into place.

Ellen's intent dark-lashed eyes came back to John Smith and he saw what might have been hurt and the beginning of doubt in them.

Bonelli said to John Smith: "You're doing all right. You're good. But not good enough, honey. I don't believe you." He nodded to the black bag in the hunchback's hand. "That's yours. You took mine. Maybe by mistake. I hope for your sake it was by mistake. You give me mine and you can have yours. Only you don't rate any part of mine now."

John Smith wondered what was his inside the bag. He wanted to tear it open, go through its contents, if any.

"The first thing I remember," he said, "was walking along a street in this city. I didn't have a bag. If I had one I don't know what happened to it."

"Maybe," Benelli said, "you checked it at the railroad station. You came down on the Pennsylvania. Maybe you have a check from leaving it at the station."

"No. I've looked."

"If it's all right by you that isn't good enough for me. Take a look, Blackie."

Blackie put his gun in his pocket. Quickly but thoroughly he went through John Smith's clothes. He made

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him sit down on the edge of the bed while he took off his shoes and inspected them.

"Sam, there ain't a thing on this louse except a copy of the *Times* and three sawbucks. He's clean."

Chuck Elliott watched John Smith put on his shoes.

"You're being a damn fool," he said. There was no longer a plea in his tone. His voice was resentful and cold.

The hunchback said genially: "There are ways of making you think your gag is not so funny. There are ways of making you remember quickly."

Blackie's gun was once more reversed in his hand. He moved menacingly towards John Smith.

With a trembly little cry Ellen Hammond flung her body in front of him.

"Don't! It's dangerous. . . ."

Benelli nodded and said, "Beautiful, it'd surprise you how little I care whether it's dangerous. And there's no use screaming. He couldn't stand having cops around any more than we could. Get her away, Chuck."

Chuck Elliot was strong. He closed in, took the girl's arms and quickly removed her. The girl cried, "You'll kill him! Don't. . . ."

John Smith set himself. Blackie paused, said: "Get rough and I'll use the other end of this heater, honey."

"Not here in the hotel you won't."

"You'll find out."

Blackie hunched his shoulders and the hand of the gun butt swept around. Ellen Hammond gave a small cry and twisted in Chuck Elliot's knotty arms. John Smith moved in, caught the blow on his wrist and drove his right into Blackie's jaw.

The blond's head snapped back and he swore without knowing what he said. He stumbled backwards, the gun slipping from his hand to the rug where the hunchback pounced upon it.

John Smith moved forward to follow up, but Blackie hit the wall next to the dressing table where Babe sat, slid half way down and then recovered himself, his hand bringing out Sylvester's automatic.

"So you done that once too often," he muttered. "And this is what you get." His squinty blue eyes were pale with anger. There was a little click as the safety catch was slipped off.

"No!" Ellen Hammond's voice was taut. "No. . . ."

John Smith started in and stopped, mesmerized by the gun pointing at his stomach. Blackie disregarded Benelli's clipped "Hold it, dummy," and squeezed the trigger.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

ROMEOS

Don't let your love-making be spoiled by a cough due to a cold . . . Keep Smith Brothers' Cough Drops handy. Black or Menthol, just 5¢.

Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only drops containing VITAMIN A

Vitamin A (Carotene) raises the resistance of mucous membranes of nose and throat to cold infections, when lack of resistance is due to Vitamin A deficiency.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MEN of-----
ROYALTY OF THE BIG TOP!
PETITE LILLIAN LEITZEL AND HER HUSBAND, ALFREDO CODONA, CAME FROM A LONG LINE OF PERFORMERS AND WERE FOR YEARS UNCROWNED KING AND QUEEN OF THE BIG TOP.
LILLIAN LEITZEL
CODONA MADE HIS CIRCUS DEBUT BEFORE HE WAS A YEAR OLD---- BALANCED ON HIS FATHER'S HAND. AT 4 HE WAS A REAL PERFORMER.
AS A "FLYER" WITH HIS BROTHER LALO FOR "CATCHER," HE WAS THE ONLY ONE DOING THE TRIPLE SOMERSAULT ON THE HIGH TRAPEZE, A STUNT THAT HAS KILLED MORE ACROBATS THAN ALL THE OTHERS PUT TOGETHER.
THE STUNT REQUIRES PERFECT TIMING AT SIXTY MILES AN HOUR. HE EVEN DID IT BLINDFOLDED! ONE NIGHT HE MISSED, CRACKED HEADS WITH LALO, AND BROKE 6 RIBS WHEN HIS BROTHER LANDED ON TOP OF HIM IN THE NET.
ONCE HE WENT THROUGH THE NET BUT ESCAPED INJURY BY A SERIES OF ROLL OVERS. IN BUENOS AIRES, ALFREDO HIT HIS ELBOW ON THE TRAPEZE, FLEW ON OVER THE PLATFORM AND FELL INTO THE ORCHESTRA 25 FEET BELOW. DOCTORS PROPHESIED A WHEELCHAIR FOR LIFE BUT IN A FEW WEEKS HE WAS BACK DOING HIS ACT AGAIN.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
ALTHOUGH ONLY 5 FEET TALL AND WEIGHING ONLY 100 POUNDS LILLIAN BECAME THE HIGHEST PAID WOMAN PERFORMER AND UNDISPUTED STAR OF THE CIRCUS.
HER ACT--THE GIANT HALF FLANGE IN WHICH SHE THREW HER BODY OVER HER OWN SHOULDER UP A ROPE 100 TIMES.(HER RECORD WAS 249!) SHE WENT ON SPOTLIGHTED AND ALONE, AND WITHOUT A SAFETY-NET!
SHE HAD ONLY ONE BAD FALL AND ESCAPED UNHURT.
LILLIAN STARTED HER CAREER AT 3!
A SANDBAG DROPPED ON HER ONCE IN FULL SWING BUT SHE MANAGED TO REACH THE GROUND BEFORE SHE FAINTED. HER ONLY REAL TERROR WAS SPIDERS AND GRASSHOPPERS!
CODONA
..... HE HAD MORE FALLS THAN ANY OTHER PERFORMER BUT NEVER LOST HIS NERVE.

Coming soon: Jean Mermoz—Pioneer of the Air Lanes

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Devils of Wong Sun

By ARDEN X. PANGBORN
Author of "The Spirit of Mr. Sing," "The Eye of the Crow," etc.

Leaning over the skylight, Wong Sun quickly slashed through the coarse fibers; then shuffled back toward the fire escape

The Chinese sagely understand that devils cannot go around corners; but to Wong Sun alone is given the wisdom required for finding the proper corner

WONG SUN, the old jeweler lifted his cracked voice in the words of a Cantonese love song he had learned in his youth as his aged feet trod the treadle of the lathe in his Mott Street window.

His gnarled fingers held a delicate oval of white jade and his thoughts wandered back over his years of labor in the Chinese colony.

Many times in the past, old Wong had been called upon to act as unofficial police force and court-of-law in the district—and his trade had suffered correspondingly. But now Chinatown had been quiet for two weeks; and not even Sergeant Mitchell, the white detective, had interrupted his work. In another hour he would finish the pair of white jade earrings he had started six months before.

Then, in token of his achievement, he would indulge himself at the drug store in Chatham Square in his lone vice—a fondness for strawberry soda pop. As he looked forward to this, his voice rose happily to the light strains of Wen Ch'ing's serenade, "The Song of the Peach and Plum Blossoms," and his old feet worked faster.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was still at his work, and the jade was beginning to take its final shape in his gnarled fingers when the brass bell above his door set up a thin jangle. The song died on his lips as he turned.

He said: "Ching How! Long life!" but he thought: There is sore trouble weighing upon the shoulders of my friend. It is shown in the drawn look on his face, and the strain in his eyes.

Returning the greeting, Ching How said: "Many sons!" But it was evident that his mind was not upon his words; and Wong Sun saw the prospect of his strawberry soda dwindling into the indefinite future.

He had seen trouble too often not to recognize it; and when there was trouble in Chinatown, he was invariably in the thick of it. He poured tea from a pot bubbling on top of a portable oil stove; and Ching How took the cup, but did not drink.

Ching How said: "You have honored me with your friendship for many years, Wong Sun."

"On the contrary," Wong insisted, "it is you who have honored me. Fifty winters ago, we departed from the City of Rams upon the same ship. Here I have seen you achieve years and wisdom untouched by the strange ways of the white devils. A thousand times I have enjoyed the hospitality of your excellent restaurant, the Lotus Petal Tea Room, around the corner in Pell Street. It is I who have been honored."

CHING How stared at the thin porcelain cup in his hand. He was a large man in spite of the droop that the years had put in his shoulders; and there was brightness in his almond eyes in spite of the wrinkles about them.

"Your wisdom is a mountain, while that of ordinary men is a molehill," he said finally, "and for that reason I have come to you. After many years of moderate prosperity, great trouble has beset the Lotus Petal Tea Room of which you have just spoken."

"But only yesterday, when I took rice at the dinner hour, there were so many people that some who could not wait were forced to go across the hall to Louie Feng's Flowering Almond Cafe for their food."

"It is not lack of trade," Ching How said. "Although if the word should spread, even the customers would stay away."

He looked about the narrow shop a little fearfully, and lowered his voice. "Within the last week, the Lotus Petal has become infested with evil spirits. I have done my best to frighten them away, but I have had no success. Already my best cooks have quit, and I am exceeding desperate, Wong Sun."

The old jeweler frowned thoughtfully. "What evidence is there of the presence of these demons, Ching How?"

"There is new evidence every night. One morning I will find the salt mixed with the sugar. Another I will find the chairs turned upside down. Another I will find the pots and pans piled in the center of the floor."

Wong Sun shook his head dubiously. These indeed were plain evidences of the working of evil influences, but his contact with the white police over a period of years had given him a somewhat broader viewpoint that Ching How possessed.

He said: "Have you made sure this could not be the work of pranksters, Ching How?"

The latter shook his head vigorously. "Each night I have placed the padlocks myself upon the heavy metal doors. The place is infested; and furthermore, I have reason to believe that already the demons are spreading to the res-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taurant of Louis Feng across the hall. In another week, they will be throughout the building, from top to bottom."

THE haunted look in his old eyes deepened. "Thus far I have prevented them from invading my home only by going around the block each night after leaving the tea room. It is well known that spirits cannot turn corners, and thus cannot follow. However, I am fearful that in time they shall seek out my dismal abode."

"And what steps have you taken to rid the Lotus Petal of these unwelcome visitors?"

"First I sought to frighten them. I obtained seven packages of firecrackers and, when everyone was gone, I opened all the doors and took away the guard screens, so that they would not be trapped inside. Then I set off the firecrackers in a dishpan, and, when the explosion subsided I put the guard screens back quickly, so that the demons could not get back. I was sure this would work, but it did not."

Wong Sun sipped noisily at the scalding tea in his cup. "Perhaps you should have sought to appease them, rather than to frighten them."

"I have thought of that also, Wong Sun. When the firecrackers did not work, I burned nine candles and nine sticks of incense in the joss house of Chang Wah in Doyers Street. Furthermore, I prepared a feast of rice and pork which I placed before the tablets of my ancestors, and another feast which I placed before the god of the kitchen."

"How much of the pork was good?"

"It was only partly spoiled. But, even so, it did not work. I am sure that something has occurred to change the favorable aspects under which the Lotus Petal has operated. You know more of *feng shui* than anyone else in the colony, Wong Sun."

The haunted look in his eyes deepened. "If you cannot help, no one can. I plead with you to study the influences which have cast this spell upon my miserable abode of business."

Wong Sun nodded. "The humble talents of your unworthy friend are at your disposal, Ching How," he agreed. "At the closing hour tonight, we shall study the influences."

The cloud upon Ching How's face lightened a little. "A thousand and ten thousand blessings," he exclaimed. He swallowed the last of his tea, returned the cup, and, clasping his large hands before him, bowed three times.

When he was gone, Wong Sun returned to his task at the lathe. He had just finished and laid aside the polished bit of jade when the doorbell set up a violent jangling.

Sergeant Mitchell, head of the Chinatown squad, lumbered across the narrow room and planted himself upon a cane-bottomed stool, after which he shoved his battered felt hat to the back of his head, and said: "Howdy, Wong Sun. How's tricks?"

Unaccustomed to such friendliness on the part of the sergeant, Wong Sun merely blinked his old eyes in surprise.

The sergeant stretched out his heavy legs and leaned back against the wall, which swayed a little under the weight of his massive shoulders. He said: "Look, Wong Sun, I just got a letter from Mike Donavan, who's on the cops in Baltimore. I gotta have some help and you're just the guy what can give it to me."

Expecting the worst, Wong bobbed his old head. "Enlightment please," he requested.

The sergeant's stubby fingers fished through the pockets of his blue serge

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suit, finally emerging with the crumpled envelope from which they extracted a slip of white paper. The sergeant's bushy eyebrows waggled in concentration as he scanned the sweeping handwritten lines.

"MY friend Donovan says there's a Chink friend of his named Sam Leong who's going to be in New York in two or three days looking for a good restaurant to buy. He wants me to help him out."

"The task should be easy," Wong pointed out. "There are many restaurants in Chinatown."

"But I don't know the good ones from the bad ones. All I ever eat down here is a hamburger over in the Happy Hours Pool Hall off the Square. Now what I want to find out is where there's a real good buy, so I can do this favor for Mike Donovan."

"Perhaps Sam Leong will have ideas of his own regarding the purchase."

"That don't make any difference. I don't care whether he buys anything, or not, but I want to be able to give him a steer so when he goes back to Baltimore he will tell Donovan I helped him out. Get it? Some day I'll want a favor from Donovan."

Wong Sun's old face clouded with thought. "He will be here tomorrow or the next day?" he said.

The sergeant nodded.

"According to what Donovan says."

"Is he a young man or has he many years?"

"How should I know that? But what difference would it make, anyway?"

"Your unworthy friend was merely wondering if he would be concerned about the activity of evil spirits."

"Huh!" The sergeant pursed his thick lips and beetled his brows. "Evil spirits! You always talk in riddles, Wong Sun. What's on your mind?"

The hint of a smile added new wrinkles to the crumpled parchment of the old jeweler's cheeks. "There is an excellent restaurant around the corner in Pell street. It is owned by Ching How and is called the Lotus Petal Tea Room."

"Wait! Let me write that down." The sergeant found the stub of a pencil, and painstakingly scrawled the name on the back of the envelope "That's just what I want," he said. "You're sure it's better than these other joints along here?"

"It is a pearl among pebbles."

"Huh? Oh, I get it. All right, I'll tell him you recommended it."

But Wong Sun was no longer listening. His eyes showed that his mind was far away. "The man who has but one road to travel may never reach his destination," he reflected as he watched the sergeant's big shoulders and bull-like neck disappear from view beyond the dusty windows of the jewelery shop. "The presence of Sam Leong may provide another road for Ching How."

With this comforting thought in his mind, he chased Ling, his cat, away from the goldfish bowl behind the counter, and went in search of his hat.

THE evening meal had been served and closing time was at hand in the Lotus Petal Tea Room when Wong Sun climbed the long flights of stairs of the old brick building in Pell Street to reach Ching How's establishment.

In the upper hallway, Louis Feng, proprietor of the Flowering Almond Cafe, was snapping a heavy brass padlock on his doors across the hall as Wong reached the landing.

Louie Feng was a short fat man, with high cheekbones, dreamy black

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes and a ready smile. Now he recognized Wong Sun and called: "Peace and long life," but as he returned the greeting, Wong thought he detected a hint of worry upon Louie Feng's round face.

Perhaps Ching How was right; perhaps whatever devils had taken possession of the Lotus Petal Tea Room had spread into the adjacent restaurant as well.

Louie Feng said nothing further, however, and Wong turned through the heavy double doors of the Lotus Petal Tea Room. He found Ching How perched on a high stool behind his cash register, counting the day's receipts with the aid of a worn abacus.

Ching How seemed relieved to see him. He slipped from his high stool and crossed hastily to close the doors. Then, looking about cautiously, as if for fear of being overheard, he said: "The hours have been long. Are you hopeful of success, Wong Sun?"

The old jeweler's thin shoulders rose in a shrug beneath the blue cotton of his jacket. "Man sees only the present," he reminded Ching How. "Let us proceed."

Together they made a tour of the entire establishment. Wong Sun poked into corners, peered under tables, opened the storage room door and searched the flour and potato bins. With a long tape, he measured the distance from wall to wall, after which he counted first the tables and then the chairs. He adjusted the screens which protected the doors of the main entrance and of the service entrance.

"There are no cracks in the walls nor floors through which the spirits could come," he said once. "There are no windows, and the doors are not only screened but are heavy enough to withstand even the blows of an axe.

"Furthermore, the *feng shui* seems favorable. There is no violation of the principals of *yin* and *yang,* the cash counter runs due east and west, and the number of both tables and chairs is in accord with proper influences."

As he progressed, deeper mystification settled upon his aged countenance. "I do not understand," he said finally, as he began a second tour of the kitchen. Then, abruptly, as his old eyes searched the ceiling, an exclamation of satisfaction broke from his lips. He pointed upward.

"Is there a canopy over the skylight?"

Ching How shook his head.

"Close scrutiny discloses error," Wong Sun said. "The skylight is open two inches or more."

"So that the fumes might escape from the range."

"*Ai!* And the demons might enter. Without a canopy, there is no corner to prevent them from direct approach."

Relief showed upon Ching How's face. "Wisdom is a jewel," he said. "We shall erect a canopy at once."

"But first, let us remember that spirits still lurk within the restaurant," Wong pointed out. He reached beneath the broad girdle about his scrawny waist and brought out three packages of firecrackers. "Let us frighten them away. Then, when the canopy is erected, they will be unable to find the way back in."

"It shall be done as you say," Ching How promised, "tonight. May the five happinesses be yours, Wong Sun."

THE old jeweler was finishing his midday rice the following noon when Ching How padded in to the shop. Ching How's large face was wrinkled with new worry; his eyes were burdened with desperation.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ai ya!" he moaned. "The devils are still there, Wong Sun. This morning, when I opened the doors at ten o'clock, the tables were turned upside down in the center of the floor."

Wong considered this information with a thoughtful frown. "You did as I suggested?" he asked.

"Exactly. I obtained a large piece of canvas. Then I opened the skylight and dropped the firecrackers. When they exploded. I placed the canvas over the skylight."

"It is common knowledge that evil spirts are unable to turn corners," Wong said. "This should have succeeded."

"But it did not, Honorable Wong, and I am desperate. Two of my best waiters refused to work today."

Wong considered some more. "It is said, 'A large fish, a large hook'," he said finally. "Perhaps three packages of firecrackers were not enough. Tonight, repeat the process using nine packages of firecrackers."

Ching How licked his lips. "I shall do as you say," he promised, but he did not seem hopeful. He started to go, then hesitated.

"There is a man from Baltimore named Sam Leong who came to see me today. He said the white detective sergeant sent him. He has offered to purchase the restaurant in spite of the devils."

"He is a young man then?"

"*Ai!* And a fool, but I am tempted."

"Two roads are better than one." Wong agreed.

"I have not wanted to sell before," Ching How said. "I have been approached many times with better offers, but have turned them down. Now, I do not know."

"When does he want an answer?"

"Tomorrow. I have promised him to decide by then. Unless we are rid of the spirits, I should be a fool not to accept."

Wong Sun nodded his old head. "Your words are those of a scholar," he agreed. "It is said, 'Of two medicines, choose the less bitter'."

Ching How had been gone but a few minutes, and Wong Sun was haggling with a tourist over the sale of an eight-cent necklace of imitation pearls, when the door of his shop banged open and the sergeant strode in with a young Chinese at his heels.

Wong Sun relinquished the pleasure of arguing with the tourist, letting the necklace go for a dollar and a quarter instead of the two dollars he had originally asked, and turned to welcome the newcomers.

The sergeant spread his big feet apart, and hooked his thick thumbs into the armholes of his vest. A broad smile twisted his lips.

"Wong Sun," he announced, "this is my friend Sam Leong from Baltimore —the one Mike Donovan wrote about."

Old Wong murmured acknowledgement as his eyes took in the wiry figure of the young Chinese.

SAM LEONG said: "I've been around to see Ching How at the Lotus Petal Tea Room, and it looks like just the kind of a spot I was looking for. I wanted to thank you for helping out."

Wong's shoulders lifted in a shrug. "Gifts without worth are easy to offer," he said. "You have concluded a purchase?"

"Well, no, and that's one reason we came round. Everyone tells me you've got more influence in Chinatown than anyone else. Ching How's holding back a little, and I thought maybe you could see him and tell him you think it'd be

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a good idea for him to sell. And, if that don't work, maybe the place across the hallway might be just as good."

"The Flowering Almond Cafe?"

"Yeah, that's the joint," chimed in the sergeant. "Louie Feng's place."

"It is not so prosperous as that of Ching How," Wong pointed out. "Furthermore, you should be warned that both places have recently become infested with devils . . ."

"Devils!" Sam Leong's youthful face broke into a grin. "Sure. Ching How told me about that. But as far as I'm concerned, that's just a lot of nonsense. I don't care how many devils there are."

Wong smiled a little sadly. "New days, new ways," he admitted.

"How about it?" asked the sergeant. "Will you see Ching How?"

Wong nodded. "If it is necessary, I shall see him first thing in the morning. In the meantime, may the nine heavens bring blessings."

Sam Leong said: "Thanks, old timer. And if this works out, I'll buy you the biggest bottle of rice wine in Chinatown."

When they were gone, Wong Sun went back to his lathe. He had no work, but he always thought best when he was busy at his trade, so he sat with his aged feet upon the worn treadle and his spare body bent over the fine emery wheel.

His bright old eyes, like bits of black amber, clouded with thought and for a long time he remained almost motionless.

When he finally arose, he shuffled into his back room, found a butcher knife on the shelf of a cupboard and sharpened it briskly on the rough metal edge of the oil stove. Then, tucking it beneath his girdle, he tossed two dried shrimp to Ling, the cat, from a box beneath the counter, and went out into Mott Street.

He lingered for half an hour over two bottles of strawberry soda pop at the drug store in Chatham Square, bickered for another twenty minutes with Wah Bo, the merchant, over three cents' worth of bean sprouts for his evening meal; and then, returning home, he retired to the cot upon which his aged bones had rested for twenty years. He was asleep in five minutes.

THE hands of the ninety-eight cent alarm clock beside the goldfish bowl pointed to ten o'clock when Wong once more locked his door and emerged into the eerie light of Mott Street's Neon signs. He padded along the crowded sidewalk, turning into Pell Street. There was no hesitation in his manner.

He climbed the darkened stairs that led to the Lotus Petal Tea Room, long since closed for the day, and, shuffling down the long hall, lifted a window at the rear and climbed out upon the rickety fire escape. Climbing again, he came to the roof.

A broad square of white canvas loomed up in the gloom where Ching How had erected a canopy to ward off the evil spirits; but old Wong did not approach it. Instead, he sought out a broad thick chimney at the far corner of the roof, and, spreading a sheet of the Chinese Nationalist newspaper upon the softest spot he could find in the graveled tar, sat down to wait.

"Action without purpose is a bowl without rice," he thought as the minutes went by. The air grew cool and he wrapped his jacket more closely about his body, but he made no move to depart. "Patience is virtue," he consoled himself, yawning.

In spite of his long nap in the after-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

noon, he dozed off finally, and when he awakened, he did so with a guilty start. He had no idea what time it was, but the reddish glow from the Neon signs of the district had dimmed a little, so that he judged it must be after eleven.

He waited for another minute, listening intently, but no sound came to his ears. Then he arose stiffly and crossed on silent feet to the canvas spread over the skylight.

Beneath the canvas, his old fingers found the edge of the opening which led to the kitchen of the Lotus Petal Tea Room below. In the blackness there, he could see nothing; but his fumbling hands encountered the object he sought, and a tight-lipped smile flickered across his face as he brought the knife from his girdle.

It was the task of but a moment to slash through the coarse fibers he had discovered. Then, nodding to himself with satisfaction, he muttered: "Heaven disposes," and shuffled back toward the fire escape.

. . . Old Wong was sweeping out his shop with a stub-handled broom he had salvaged seven months before from a neighboring garbage can when Ching How crossed the threshold shortly after ten o'clock the following morning.

Ching How's large face was wreathed in smiles and there was a new spring to his step. He seemed ten years younger than he had the day before. "Long Life," he called joyfully. "I have news, Wong Sun."

The old jeweler looked up from his housecleaning, his wrinkled face impassive as that of a Buddha. "The devils have departed," he said. "I can tell from the air of satisfaction that shows itself upon your countenance."

"Devils!" exclaimed Ching How. "There was but one devil, Wong Sun, and that was why the ordinary precautions did not succeed. That was why the firecrackers, and the feast of rice and pork, and even the canopy failed."

"One devil?" Wong repeated, frowning.

"*Ai!* And when I opened the doors this morning, I found him trapped within the restaurant. He had lowered himself by a knotted rope through the skylight in the roof, and the rope was cut somehow—perhaps on the sharp edge of the skylight. The doors are too heavy to break down, as you know, and there was no other way out."

"And who was this devil?"

"It was Sam Leong!"

WONG SUN'S bright old eyes remained inscrutable. "A pleasant face may hide evil thoughts," he said. "Sam Leong looked like an honest youth."

"Brass has the appearance of gold," Ching How agreed. "He confessed that he had been in New York for a number of days in hiding, and that he visited the restaurant five times, using the rope because he could not have gotten a ladder to the roof. It was he who placed the salt in the sugar, and piled the pots and pans on the kitchen floor, so that my best cooks departed in fright. But that is not all, Wong Sun."

Ching How caught his breath and then went on. "Sam Leong admitted he was hired by Louie Feng, who has tried many times before to buy the Lotus Petal Tea Room to combine with his own cafe across the hall. Louie Feng thought he would force me to sell in spite of my refusals, and he almost succeeded."

The hint of a smile touched Wong Sun's lips. "And what has Louie Feng to say to this?"

"When Sam Leong confronted him this morning, he admitted everything.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rather than face exposure, Louie Feng has agreed to sell out to me and retire."

"Wisdom is a jewel," murmured Wong. "Of two medicines, Louie Feng has chosen the less bitter." He reached beneath his counter and brought out a fat-bellied wine jug and two thin porcelain cups.

Ching How had been gone but a minute or two, and old Wong was trying to decide whether to finish his housecleaning or the wine in the jug when his shop door banged open again and Sergeant Mitchell barged in. The sergeant's ruddy face wore a puzzled expression.

"Lookit, Wong," he exclaimed. "I just came by to tell you to forget all about that restaurant business. I don't know what happened but this guy Sam Leong decided this morning he ain't interested any more, I guess. Anyway, he left town without even saying goodbye—so you won't need to talk to Ching How."

Wong Sun bobbed his old head. "I have just seen Ching How," he said.

"Well, it don't make any difference, I guess. But this whole business seems mighty funny to me. I wrote Donovan to tell him I would take care of Sam Leong and I just got a letter back saying he never heard of Sam Leong. It looks to me like someone wrote that letter and signed Donovan's name."

"Perhaps Sam Leong wrote it himself," Wong suggested.

"But why would he do that? It don't make sense to me, any way you look at it."

"Perhaps to gain your assistance in bringing pressure upon someone who was reluctant to sell a restaurant."

The sergeant scratched at the side of his jaw with a stubby forefinger. "You mean Ching How? But look, Sam Leong ain't interested in Ching How's joint. If he was so keen on it that he'd take a chance like that, why would he change his mind so quick?"

"Perhaps the habits of evil spirits had something to do with his decision."

The sergeant's puzzlement deepened. He waggled his eyebrows. "There you go again. Evil spirits!"

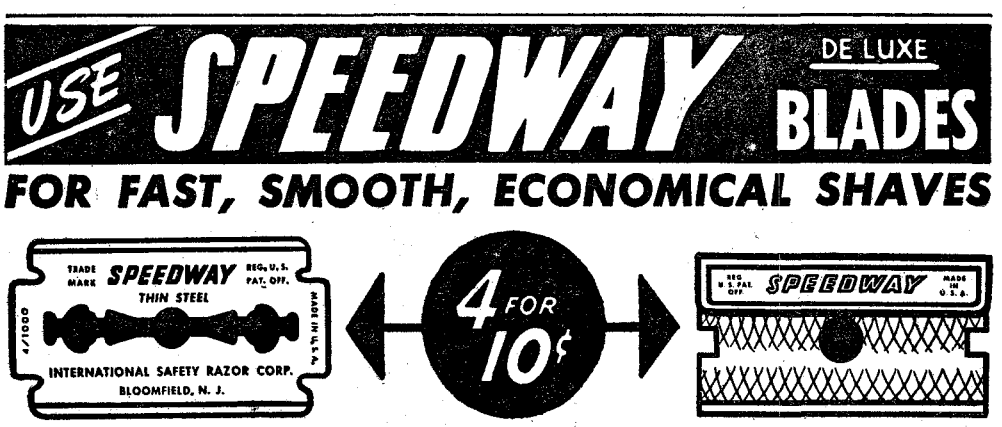
"It is common knowledge that evil spirits do not go around corners."

"Huh? What do you mean by that?"

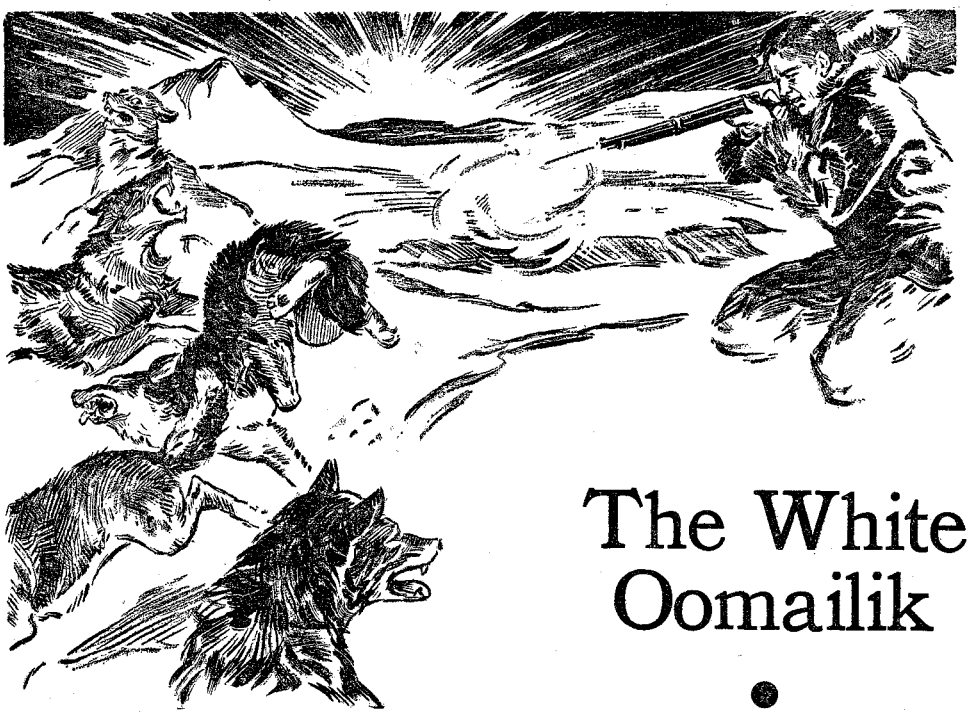
"Anything that can go around a canopy isn't an evil spirit," said Wong. "It is very simple."

"I don't savvy what you're talking about," said the sergeant, waggling his eyebrows some more.

Wong smiled. "It is a matter of no importance," he said.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The reindeer were in a panic; Tim dropped to his knees and fired at the lead wolf

The White Oomailik

By
FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

OLD Sulphur-bottom Banning, head of the Maine whaling clan, had an excellent, if devilish, reason for deeding three of his ships to his nephew Tim. The old man knew the Banning fleet was caught in Alaskan ice, and so he presented Tim with the gigantic task of rescuing them.

Actually, Tim would have had the job anyhow. A lieutenant in the Revenue Cutter Service, he is ordered north to organize a relief expedition. His position is especially ticklish because there are Ridley ships in the stranded fleet, and the Ridleys are the bitter rivals of the Bannings; Tim must not let this rivalry interfere with his duty as a Government man. Curiously enough, the Ridleys will make money out of the Alaskan catastrophe: They have an enormous stock of whale-bone and oil on hand, and now the market will be booming.

TIM Banning plans to take supplies overland by reindeer to the stranded men. He mushes north alone, in search of deer and Eskimo herders; and on the trail he meets up with Mary Ridley. In spite of his admiration for the lovely, courageous girl, Tim does not quite trust her, knowing that the Ridley interests will benefit if his relief expedition fails. Nevertheless, he and Mary join forces.

Meanwhile, Bill Ridley is working to wreck Tim Banning's plans. Roused from a month-long drunk by the sinister Scalzo, a Ridley man, Bill leaves his native wife, Arnaretauk, and heads north, apparently to hamstring the relief expedition. Scalzo has already enlisted Antuk, a shaman, to set natives against Tim Banning.

TIM and Mary arrive at Bill Ridley's igloo—to find Arnaretauk alone there, soon to bear a child. While Mary assists the native girl, Tim organizes his herders. Suddenly, then, he meets disaster—the result of Antuk, and Eskimo superstition. Working on the native's strange fear of childbirth, Antuk so terrifies the herders that they desert Tim. The relief expedition is itself stranded. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for February 3

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER XII

THE EYES OF THE ICE

TIM BANNING ran over and examined Oopick. The native was not unconscious as Tim had hoped, but dead. Nor was there a mark on him that even remotely suggested violence: Little wonder Akadriak's herders were so impressed by the shaman's powers that they were quitting the venture.

"It's a lead-pipe cinch I can't drive five hundred reindeer to Barrow alone," Tim muttered. He stared gloomily at the fifty miles of ice that lay ahead of the uneasy herd. Antuk was the only man who could help him, and Antuk would demand his pound of flesh. Tim cursed, but he knew there was no other way out. Mary Ridley, Arnaretauk and her baby boy would have to manage. He stowed Oopick's remains in an igloo and set off after the retreating natives.

Uneasiness swept through the herders as he joined them. The shaman's eyes momentarily flashed fear, then set in a hard, triumphant glitter. "Antuk!" Tim said. "You big shaman! Big chief! We talk!" Under his breath he growled, "Damn his hide, he knows he's got me over a barrel."

"You talk," Antuk answered. "I listen!" He thumped his chest and spit through his teeth.

"I plenty big man too," Tim informed him, spitting between his teeth and thumping his chest. "But maybe you bigger man—maybe. I give you just reward if you send herders back. If you take evil eye off them—or whatever it is."

"You give Antuk paper talk?" The shaman guardedly inquired.

Tim understood. Paper talk was a written order on a trader or revenue cutter for supplies. He had issued such orders to Akadriak and other natives for various amounts.

"Yes, I give you paper talk all right," Tim agreed. He was breathing easier now. It looked as if he might straighten up the situation. "I give you big paper talk."

"When you give?"

"I fix up now. You go tell herders go back to work," Tim directed. With a dramatic flourish he drew an order book and pencil from his pocket.

Antuk grinned smugly and hurried over to the herders. He talked at some length, then went through a weird incantation, accompanied by much shaking of his shaman's rattle. He turned his evil face toward Tim every few seconds to assure himself that Tim was working on the paper talk.

Antuk finished and the herders held a brief conference. Akadriak spake forcefully, and then in complete agreement they turned about and started north once more. Tim handed Antuk the slip of paper. "When *umiak puk* comes next summer," he said, refering to the Revenue Cutter *Aurora*, "you go aboard and give this to the captain. He give you what's coming to you."

"I give paper talk and get what's coming?" Antuk repeated.

"That's it," Tim assured him.

Tim Banning returned to Bill Ridley's cabin in high glee. As all was quiet, he camped in one of the shacks, and gave Arnaretauk and Mary a chance to sleep.

WHEN he awakened the following morning, the girl was talking to several strange Eskimos who had obviously just arrived. "These are Arnaretauk's people," she informed him, "and now that the youngster has arrived and the curse has been lifted, they feel it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

safe to return. You appear to have done a little curse lifting yourself." She nodded toward the active native camp near the grazing herd.

"Antuk had to demand his rake-off," Tim explained. "There was a lot of gab about paper talk and in the end I gave him an order on the *Aurora* and he lifted the curse."

"It seems to me," she said, "somewhere, some time, an American said, 'Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!' Don't you think you are encouraging the regular levying of tribute by giving in to Antuk?"

"Yes, perhaps, as a regular thing. But wait until Antuk sees what his paper talk gets him when he boards the *Aurora,*" Tim's smile was grim. "Are you ready for the big gamble—the trek over the ice?"

"Start along when you're ready," Mary answered, "and I'll follow. My dogs have had a rest and they'll be ready for anything."

Tim was conscious of a tenseness in the atmosphere itself when he joined the herd a half hour later. The wind was blowing the snow about, and fine, sharp particles were falling. The grind and growl of the great ice pack came faintly. Off-shore, even in the coldest weather, there was ice movement. Winds, changes in temperature, expansion and contraction toyed with the pack.

He climbed a ridge and gazed over the icy waste, studying the sky as well as the floes, for the presence of too much snow registered on the clouds. But there was too much snow for him to see any great distance.

Tim returned to the herd and was immediately ringed by the herders. Vague fears of disaster were disturbing them and weakening their determination to proceed. There was one way to check that—plunge them into the adventure before discussion increased their fears. He signaled Akadriak. The latter shouted orders to the herders.

What followed was like the opening of a dam. Several reindeer started down the narrow canyon, urged by the herders. The deer on either side began pressing in and downward, forcing the leaders toward the ice.

Suddenly the leaders ran. The gulch and the herd flowed over the ice like a rising tide. "Keep 'em going!" Tim yelled. "Turn the leaders, they're trying to swing back to land. Lively."

The herders who understood English translated the command. The point of the herd bend landward; then Lapp dogs and herders rushed in and straightened it out. Food lay behind. Barren ice and nameless dangers lay ahead, and every instinct in the deer warned them. For nearly an hour men and animals waged a furious struggle. Tim, on a sled drawn by Old King Cole, took the lead. The train followed, and either because the main herd was tired of the struggle, or because the sight and scent of deer ahead calmed them, they followed.

But Tim knew he could not relax until the herd was on solid ground. Driving ahead, he wondered what Scalzo and Bill Ridley were doing right then.

GRADUALLY the icy shore line receded. The deer moved slowly, restlessly; the nerves of the usually placid Eskimos were on edge. Ice parted somewhere, with a continuing boom, that spread a hush among the men. Tim Banning was conscious of the pounding of his own heart, so tense was the strain.

The clicking of toes as the herd

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moved should have been music to his ears, but somehow he found it nerve wracking. They were crazy, uncertain critters, he thought. Why couldn't they be like cattle? A man could pretty well guess what cattle would do next. But reindeer . . .

Five miles lay behind, then ten. Tim felt like forcing the herd and men to move the entire fifty miles, to get some good solid ground underneath, but Akadriak shook his head. Tim knew it was impossible anyway.

They camped on the ice and Tim went ahead, sizing up the situation, because he was too nervous to relax. Pressure ridges had formed, but he found no open water and it was easy enough to avoid the ridges. He suddenly whirled and stared at the ice, conscious of an almost overpowering feeling that eyes were watching him. But there was nothing there on the ice; this must be a trick his nerves were playing on him. He was not reassured yet, however, that strange feeling had been so strong that he had to investigate further.

He headed for a group of pressure ridges, believing that danger, if any, lurked there. He circled them, half expecting tracks might lead in, but found nothing. Still he was not entirely convinced that the definite sense of impending danger was simply the result of strained nerves.

Tim started back for the herd, picking his trail slowly, listening to the grind of the pack, and frequently throwing back his parka hood to free his ears for other sounds. Nothing came until he was within a mile of camp, then a new sound froze him to the spot.

"Wolves!" he exclaimed. And the next instant he laughed at his fears.

The sound, real or imaginary, came from some point far ahead, and it was foolish to think wolves would stray so far from shore. Nevertheless he stood there, with straining ears, waiting. All sounds here were subject to moods of the wind. Then it came—faint, but definite enough. It ended suddenly, as if some unseen hand had descended and strangled the creature in the midst of its cry.

"What I need is a good night's sleep," he grumbled.

He found the camp quiet enough on his return. Two herders moved about with Lapp dogs. The others rested and the deer had shaken off their nervousness which earlier had given Tim so much concern. He settled down to get the sleep he needed so badly.

Tim Banning was very much surprised to crawl out of his sleeping bag the following morning and discover that he had slept eight hours without a break.

He climbed a pressure ridge and looked behind. A faint column of wood smoke was rising above the ice, five miles away. Mary Ridley was trailing him, and true to her promise, was remaining far enough in the rear to prevent her dogs from frightening the deer.

"Did you hear wolves any time last night?" he asked one of the herders who had stood guard.

"No," the man answered. "Wolves come. Deer go like hell! Get lost on ice. No find." He shook his head dubiously over the prospect, then went about the business of getting the herd to solid ground.

CHAPTER XIII

CRY WOLF

THE herd crawled. An eerie light lay on the frozen ground. Wind carrying the breath of death blew out

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the north, freezing the vapor from their nostrils and coating their clothing with frost. The aurora borealis sent fluttering streamers of white light, occasionally tinged with purple, from the horizon to a point over their heads.

Tim Banning rode a sled drawn by Old King Cole. The deer was heading straight for land, speeded by the knowledge that food lay ahead. To the left the Kotzebue Sound ice was worn ragged by its eternal floes from the Arctic. There were narrow inlets and bays of water thinly coated with young ice. In the distance he could hear the sullen growl of the great pack.

Without warning Old King Cole suddenly swung around in a panic. Tim tried desperately to control the deer, but before he could really get a good grip on the load, the sled had driven deep into the main herd and Tim found himself shoulder deep in a tossing sea of antlers. Ribs pressed against his arms, hoofs trampled on his feet. He yanked a rifle from the load, and using the heavy butt as a club, forced his way clear.

"Wolf come!" a herder shouted.

Tim saw a half dozen gaunt forms racing from behind a pressure ridge. He dropped to his knees, aimed at the lead wolf and fired. The animal collapsed in mid-air, but its companions bounded on, intent on the herd, unconscious of danger or the death of their leader.

"You get 'nother!" a herder yelled. "Quick!" Tim aimed, but as he pulled the trigger, the herder tumbled on top of him, spoiling his aim. The rifle cracked, and hard on the report came a second, close at hand.

But where?

Tim hurled the herder aside, ready to face treachery in his own ranks. Then he saw the man was dying from a rifle wound—a .45—70 caliber slug had torn a hole in his chest. The native had taken a bullet intended for Tim's own head. The herder's brother cried out sharply, his eyes murderous. "I get!" he panted. "I get! I kill!"

Before Tim could stop him, the herder, grasping an ivory-headed harpoon, was crawling over the ice, stalking an unknown rifleman as he would stalk a seal.

There was nothing to do now but let him go.

Tim rolled to the cover of a loaded sled and resumed his fire on the wolves. He saw a huge animal spring, sink its teeth into a deer's throat and bring it down. He fired and the deer got up, the wolf's teeth still in his throat. The buck shook itself free and bounded into the herd, adding to the panic. The wolf lay on the ice, twitching.

Two herders killed the remaining wolves with their harpoons. Tim watched the scattered herd a moment. It was stampeding toward the sea and nothing human on legs could stop it. He shifted his rifle and waited, eyes on the pressure ridge, hoping for a shot at the man who had killed one of his herders in an effort to kill him.

The sniper, having approached close enough to shoot, could not have escaped yet. Tim stared intently at a low point, across from which anyone must pass in order to retreat to the rough ice beyond. Once in that rough ice a man could make his way, practically unseen, to shore.

FIVE minutes passed without incident. Tim guessed it was a waiting game, with the attacker watching for a chance to finish him. The man must know that it would take a white man's organizing to save any of the herd and drive it on to Barrow.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Suddenly he saw movement. A parka hood lifted slowly—an amazing parka hood fashioned of ermine. He had never seen anything exactly like it. It lifted higher and Tim yanked his hand from a mitt and crooked a finger around the trigger. A rifle lifted above the pressure ridge, the ermine head vanished, then the rifle was lowered and the head reappeared.

Tim took careful aim, but before he fired a hand flashed up and knocked the rifle aside. "Don't shoot, Tim!" It was Mary Ridley who had dropped from nowhere at the precise moment Tim sighted that ermine head.

He flung out his arm and knocked the girl sprawling; then risking a bullet, he stood up, aimed hastily and fired. The ermine head vanished as the rifle echoed over the ice. There, under the hard white light of the aurora borealis, Mary's face turned the color of death. "Bill!" she cried out. "Bill!"

In that instant, at the thought that he had killed Bill Ridley, Bill felt a savage satisfaction. Then he saw Mary running across the ice—and Bill Ridley was no longer simply a man who had tried to shoot him from ambush.

Tim raced after the girl, intent on getting possession of Bill Ridley's rifle before Mary could. She scrambled to the crest of a ridge and then tumbled to the ice on the opposite side.

As Tim vaulted over, he spread his feet suddenly to avoid landing squarely on the herder who had set out to avenge his brother's death. The Eskimo lay flat on his back, with his own harpoon driven deep into his breast. There was no sign of Bill Ridley.

Tim drew out the shaft from the herder's breast. The iron head, designed to free itself from the shaft, remained embedded, a short length of seal line trailing from it.

Mary looked wildly about. "Bill!" she shouted desperately. "Bill!" She ran and vanished in the shadows. Tim waited nearly fifteen minutes, believing Bill Ridley might have stayed in the vicinity to get in one more shot.

Mary came slowly out of the shadows. She was exhausted, but she was also defiant. "You didn't hit him!" she exclaimed. "It was a clean miss. Thank God!"

"That makes us even," Tim answered. "He missed me. And the missing wasn't intentional on either hand." He regarded her with suspicion. "Where did you come from? And where's your team?"

"I thought we were near enough to the land so I could go on without stampeding the deer," she answered evenly. "When I heard the shooting I came up. The deer were stampeding. Akadriak pushed me off my sled and went after the team. Then I saw you aiming at Bill's head—"

"How'd you know it was Bill's head?" Tim sharply demanded. "Maybe it was Scalzo's—"

"I recognized the ermine parka hood," Mary answered. "Arnaretauk told me she had made it for him. It is the only one of its kind in the North. And he got away—and I'm glad."

"And if I didn't have a job here on the ice saving what deer I can," Tim retorted, "I'd hunt that hellhound down. He's killed two of my herders. And killing an Eskimo is murder. As for you—" Tim picked her up in a crushing embrace and carried her to a sled. He stuffed her into his own sleeping bag and lashed her securely to the sled. "Blood is thicker than water and I'm not forgetting it."

"And you'd hate me if I did forget it," she retorted. "You know you would."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sure." He scowled thoughtfully into the calm face looking up at him from the sled. The aurora borealis emphasized its strength and sharpened the lure that it had always held for him. "It would be just my luck to love a Ridley," he exploded. Just my hellish Banning luck."

"You have a tender way of telling me," she said, and her voice was low, amused and baffling. "A very tender way," she repeated.

"You have the brutal truth—now make the most of it," he answered angrily. "But it'll get you no favors. If I can lay lands on Bill Ridley, I'll settle with him. And I'll take the necessary measures to dull your claws, too."

HE SET off over the ice, stopped and examined the first dead wolf, then hurried on to the next. Presently he returned. "Those wolves were trapped, brought here in cages, then released with the idea of starting a stampede," he told her. "The two I examined had trap marks on their legs. And patches of fur had been rubbed off on the cage bars.

"I thought it was queer for wolves to be prowling so far from land. That was a typical Ridley trick and Bill was lurking around to see how it worked out. When he realized I was going to drop them with the rifle, he tried to drop me."

Mary made no answer and Tim joined the herders. Akadriak, with the dog team on the dead run, had cut in between the deer and the dangerous ice and was turning the main herd back. The Lapp dogs were helping. Three deer huddled on an ice cake which was drifting a few yards off the solid ice, and a fourth was trying to gain footing on safe ice. Tim dropped a loop over its horn and hauled it in.

Akadriak pulled into camp with ice coating his left leg where he had stepped through thin ice. Tim built a fire and dried out all damp footgear, while the scattered herd gradually bunched and moved toward shore.

Tim placed Mary on the dog sled and drove directly to the shore. A column of smoke, nearly five miles away, mounted at daylight and remained there, a beacon that gave him hope of aid. Or else it was an enemy trap. He wasn't sure which.

"I'll have a look," he said to Mary. "It may be Surgeon Newton's camp."

A mile from the camp a fur-clad figure, waving both arms, hurried out to meet them. "Newton!" Tim bellowed. "You made it!"

Newton pounded Tim on the back, then pushed back his parka hood and eyed him with professional interest. "Face thin and drawn. You've been under a strain, man," he said.

"You're no rosy-cheeked cherub, Doc," Tim observed. "But the point is, we're here. You've a whale of a load of supplies and there are the deer."

"Who's on the sled?"

"Mary Ridley. She's a prisoner." He outlined what had happened. "The case against her, on the face of things, is bad. She insists she found a message which described conditions at Barrow. It influenced me to attempt a crossing. She claims someone freed her dogs, which naturally sent her looking for help—me."

"And she had the message with her," Newton said. "That started you over the ice, where everything was set to stampede the herd. It does look bad. What're you going to do with her?"

"Keep her."

"Keep her for a pet?" Newton asked, grinning.

"Keep her out of mischief."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where does this Antuk come in?" Newton continued. "Is there a tie-up between him, Scalzo, Bill Ridley and the girl?"

"There's probably a tie-up somewhere," Tim said, "though Antuk may be going it alone. The thing that amazes me is, the native I kept in the cabin with Arnaretauk did die, just as Antuk said he would. I examined his body. There wasn't a mark on it. So if Antuk didn't bring about his death, then the medicine man was lucky and the death played right into his hands."

"Some fantastic things happen up here," Newton remarked. "How much of a bribe did you give Antuk? What does his paper talk call for when he presents it to the *Aurora?*"

Tim grinned. "It calls for his arrest for criminal interference with the Overland Expedition," he replied.

CHAPTER XIV

FROST SHIP

TIM and Newton squatted down by the surgeon's driftwood fire. "Assuming the message the girl found between the boards is genuine," Newton said, "then discipline is needed at Barrow. Men, starving on the beach, will be more likely to take orders from a Government man than from their former masters. I suggest you leave me in charge of the deer for the present and get through rapidly as possible."

"They probably need medical attention as badly as discipline," Tim said gloomily. "But I'll go and take Mary Ridley along. We'll use her dog team. Do the best you can with Akadriak's help, and watch out for Bill Ridley and company."

Tim returned to Mary. She regarded him coldly. "If the plotting and counterplotting is finished," she said, "I'd like to go over to that fire and warm up."

"Come on!" He released her and a minute later introduced her to Newton.

The doctor prepared a meal for the three of them and Tim ate and watched the two expeditions mingle. Tim's Eskimo reindeer drivers exchanged greetings with Newton's, while the herd fed on neighboring slopes. Lapp dogs dropped in the snow, exhausted.

Akadriak came up and got acquainted, through the interpreter, with his new chief. Despite their weariness, the herders seemed to be elated. Frequently they glanced back over the icy waste that had almost taken their herd, and grinned. They had accomplished something never done before. They had made history and they were proud of it.

Presently Tim drew Mary aside. "You're going north with me, of course. How will it be? As a prisoner, lashed to the sled so that you won't spoil my aim if I'm attacked by some of the Ridley crowd? Or will you give me your promise to behave?"

"I'll promise to warn you before I—misbehave," she answered. "I didn't enjoy riding lashed to that sled." Her eyes flashed. "Wouldn't I just love having you as a prisoner for a while. And I will, too, before this affair is ended."

Tim spread their two outfits on the ground, eliminated all but necessities, made them up into two separate packs and lashed them to the sled. He turned and waved his hand at the expedition, then cracked the whip. The dogs broke the sled free with a sudden jerk, and the sled sped northward, with Tim Banning at the gee pole and Mary Ridley running at his heels.

Surgeon Newton watched them out of sight; then he shook his head dubiously. "I don't envy Tim his job," he murmured.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tim headed directly for the whaling station at Point Hope. Here he expected to pick up information on conditions at Barrow and possibly find a man who would return and help Newton drive the deer.

He ordered Mary to ride whenever possible and managed to ride some stretches himself. Snow began flying, but he held to his course. Night fell and there was no indication he intended camping. Mary smiled. "We Ridleys thank you for the compliment, Tim," she said, breaking a long silence. "You are putting plenty of distance behind you because you have an idea Bill may be trailing you, isn't that it?"

"That's about the size of it," he admitted. "I have a wholesome respect for Ridley resourcefulness. But we'd better camp now."

"You feel you're safe from Bill now?" she asked.

"No. I'll never feel safe until I've locked him up," Tim retorted. "But I can't afford to lose any sleep over it."

Tim had been unsparing of himself and the girl that day and both were too tired to eat. They gulped down hot tea and crawled into their sleeping bags.

SUBSEQUENT days were similar. Without warning they swooped down on the Port Hope whaling station and while Mary sat on the sled, telling herself she was too tired to move, Tim aroused the camp and explained that the Overland Expedition was on its way. He found a man named Sheedy who agreed to meet the herd, take charge and relieve Surgeon Newton.

"You'd better put up here for the night," someone advised.

Tim shook his head. "Things are in bad shape at Barrow, aren't they?"

"So they claim," the other replied. "Who's the man you've got with you? He must be a skookum cuss to make it here in winter."

Tim glanced at Mary. Nearly everyone in camp was standing around staring, including the dogs. It was almost beyond belief that anyone could push through, constantly fighting the cold and the ceaseless northeast wind.

"That's Mary Ridley," Tim informed them. "She's here to look after the Ridley interests." He turned to Sheedy. "Do whatever is necessary to get the deer to Barrow and I'll back your hand." Then he spoke sharply to the dogs and Mary stood up as they broke the sled clear.

Tim felt victory was within grasp, yet he knew it was far in the future. The frost legions were not done with him. There were days when he and Mary huddled in the tent while the storm howled down and buried tent, dogs and equipment. Others days when it seemed as if his legs would break off at the hips. He pushed over the frozen Arctic most of the time. Often there were obstacles—great heaps of ice—but skirting these taxed their strength less than climbing hills and slipping into the lowlands.

They rarely spoke, each knowing what must be done in camp and on the trail, and each doing it. Tim didn't want to look into Mary's face any more—it was so pale and drawn. She was so white as she lay in her sleeping bag that she seemed like someone frozen to death. As the days passed the picture tortured him. As if it were a premonition.

Far out on the ice, with day fading, she ran behind him. And then suddenly he looked and she was no longer with him. He stared back and saw nothing.

Mushing hour after hour drugs a man. He runs mechanically, hand on the gee pole, eyes on the laboring dogs,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most of the time. But there are smooth stretches when he can run with his eyes closed, and then the brain grows clouded. It was during some such period that he lost her. He had no idea of the passage of time. Perhaps she had been gone ten minutes; possibly an hour.

He turned the team back and lashed the dogs into a frenzy. Every faculty was keenly alive now. One mile, two, then three. Finally he saw her, little more than a white mound on a limitless world of ice. The flakes had almost buried her.

"Mary!" Tim panted.

She opened her eyes. "I played out . . . Tim. Go on. Leave me some food and a pack. I'll make it . . . sometime. It was just as if I walked off the end of the earth"

"Lightheaded from exhaustion," he said. "We camp here tonight. Our strength has to be spread over the entire distance—not used up in one leg of the trek."

Tim put up the tent and got a fire going in the collapsible stove. He poured hot tea into her, then drank nearly a quart himself.

"Tim," she said slowly, "just before I fell, I saw a phantom ship. It was beautiful—a frost ship, glistening in the distance, with frost rigging, masts and yards, a frost stack. And it was moving toward an open lead—you know, a break in the pack. It was about the size of a boy's toy."

"Was it a barkentine with the stack set between the main and mizzen masts?" Tim asked.

She nodded. "Is that significant?"

"You probably saw my *Audacious,*" he said. "The current sets in along this shore. She's probably swinging with the pack in what is roughly a great circle."

"I'd have known a real ship," she insisted. "This—well, it wasn't real. It was a lovely miniature."

"You were exhausted and dazed. But I'm going to have a look if you don't mind staying alone," he said. The possibility of seeing his own vessel heartened him.

"Go ahead," she answered, "but don't lose your way back to camp."

TIM was gone a half hour and when he appeared she knew that excitement has conquered his fatigue. Mary partly crawled from her sleeping bag and cried, "What is it, Tim?"

"It's the *Audacious!* Just as you pictured her. She's five miles out! The ice seems to have stranded. If we can get around the pressure ridges, we can board her. There's coal, tight cabins. and food. A day's rest will work wonders for us. You can sleep on a good bed for a night. The dogs will rest and we'll more than make up the time we lose. Are you good for five more miles today?"

"I think I am, Tim," she answered. For a moment rivalry between them was forgotten. The *Audacious* was tangible evidence that they had fought their way to within striking distance of one of the wrecked vessels.

He broke camp and loaded Mary and their equipment onto the sled. A mile from camp Mary sighted the whaler. The miniature was somewhat larger now, but it still remained an exquisitely fashioned model done in silver.

She watched it grow while the sled runners screamed over the ice and a cloud of vapor hovered over the dogs' backs. They went into rough ice a half mile from the whaler. Mary jumped off and lent a hand. The sled slipped, tilted and crashed over shattered ice hummocks three and four feet high. A quarter mile from the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Audacious Tim stopped, cached their outfit and led the dogs the remaining distance.

A jacob's ladder dangled from the bow, twisted and frozen stiff. The ship listed slightly to starboard and only the ice prevented her from rolling over on her beam ends. Tim tied up the dogs, then held the ladder while Mary climbed aboard. He followed and they crossed over a deck covered with snow.

He glanced about and noted the condition of the gear. There was every evidence of hurried departure. The pack had no doubt closed in, imprisoned the whaler, and the crew, fearing she would go down, had hastily abandoned ship.

She had been squeezed, perhaps shattered and filled with water, but the ice, working on the specially constructed hull, had lifted her up instead of forcing her down. He cleared away the snow in front of the cabin door and forced an entrance. The air within was heavy and burdened with the chill of death. Tim struck a match, then held Mary back with his left arm.

"Something wrong here," he said. "But I guess you can face most anything, now." He found a candle, lit it, then got one of the heavy oil lamps going.

Plenty was wrong.

Mary remained where he had left her, leaning wearily against the cabin bulkhead, her eyes on the captain who sat in a chair, with his frozen face turned toward the door. His right arm rested on the open ship's log book, and a stub of a pencil lay just beyond the finger tips. A lamp on the table had burned out. The captain's left hand rested on his leg. His pipe lay on the cabin floor where it had fallen from his lips.

Tim dragged the chair and its motionless occupant into an adjoining room and closed the door. He cleared the stovepipe of snow and ice, then built a fire. When the stove began to glow, he opened the door, forced open a port and aired out the place.

"This is the first mate's room," he said, opening a door. "We'll warm it up. That's yours for tonight. I'll find a tub and pack in enough hot water for a bath. We'll have to keep that stove red hot, though, and dry out the bedding."

"I'll take care of that," she offered. She sat down near the stove and stoked it frequently. Tim was busy bending lines and hanging up the bedding.

HE SAT down at last and turned the pages of the log book. An envelope fell out and Tim noticed it was addressed to his grandfather. He drew out a sheet of folded paper, covered with the same scrawl that recorded the ship's movements in the log book. It read:

Dear Sulphur-bottom:

Maybe this should be included in the ship's log. Maybe it's a personal letter to you. There's a tradition in the Banning whaling fleet that started a hundred years ago—The Bannings look after their people.

There's an order that's been passed down from owner to master, too, that's almost as old—Banning whalers are sailors first and Banning men afterward. That's always been taken to mean: help anybody, even your worst enemy, if he's in trouble.

Last fall when the ice closed in on the fleet I got clear. The Ridley's new whaler, *Mary Ridley,* was caught, I hated to see a new ship lost, and went in. Got her clear, but stranded myself. She, a lighter draft vessel, got through shoal water and out of danger and later put into an inlet, where she has a fair chance to winter safely.

When it looked as if the ice would crush the *Audacious* I sent my people ashore. There was little time to lose. And now, I'm making my last port. It's the heart, I think. I stayed with my command, hoping she might sometime get clear. Maybe you will see this letter. Perhaps no man's eyes will see it. It was a privilege to have served

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

under you; to feel the iron of your discipline. Because of it I'm not afraid to die alone in the ice. I salute you, sir.

Obediently,

Daniel Strawn,
Master.

"And I salute Daniel Strawn, Master," Tim Banning said as he finished reading the note. He hastily scanned the log book, and there he found the curt, dry record of a man who had done everything humanely possible to preserve his command. "Ironical, wasn't it, he'd lose the *Audacious* saving the *Mary Ridley?*"

Mary nodded silently, biting her under lip.

"Even now," Tim said, "I could get up steam, and with a liberal use of explosives and steam power I could get her to a place of safety. In a week's time I believe it could be accomplished singlehanded, with patience. But I haven't the week's time."

And there he was with a boat that belonged to Tim Banning and did him no good—because Lieutenant Banning couldn't move it out.

While Mary took her bath, Tim examined the ship's papers. She carried a fair cargo of bone and oil. "And she's mine," he told himself with sudden elation, "deeded to me along with the *Aleutian* and the *Wanderer* because my precious uncle thought they were lost. Maybe, *maybe,* Sulphur-bottom is going to get fooled."

When Mary had turned in, he borrowed the tub, refilled it and enjoyed the first tub bath in weeks. It was good to feel a ship's bunk under his body again. Tim stretched. In the morning he would empty the ship's medicine chest and take the contents on to Barrow. Yes, he would do that in the morning. But thank the Lord morning was a long way off.

CHAPTER XV

MAN WITH THE FROZEN FACE

TIM got up enormously refreshed the next morning. He made the ship's medical supplies up into a pack, carried them to the sled, then returned. . . . Mary had breakfast ready. She was heavy-eyed but determined. "I want to get on, too," she told him. "It isn't snowing today. It may be blowing a gale tomorrow. What are you going to do with Captain Strawn's body?"

"What could be a better tomb for a shipmaster than his command?" Tim asked. "The pack will carry the *Audacious* to the Arctic Basin within a month."

She regarded him curiously, knowing full well that if he elected to remain there was better than an even chance that he could salvage ship and cargo. It struck her as odd that he did not appear to be even slightly influenced to remain. There were plenty of excuses he could have offered that would have convinced even his superior officers. Tim might well have reported that he had delayed to salvage the vessel because her provisions were needed.

He was hewing to the line with a vengeance, and the consequences, Mary knew, were going to be far-reaching.

All that day and the next they moved steadily over the ice without incident. Mary was constantly on the lookout for other ships caught in the ice. There was no telling where the ice might strand them. The morning of the third day Tim abruply changed his course. "Captain Strawn's log reported that he had spoken your whaling schooner *Polar Night* and that she hoped to winter in Fish Inlet," he explained. "Her people may have gone on to Barrow."

They sighted the tip of a topmast shortly before noon. It tilted at a dan-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gerous angle—proof the craft wasn't riding on an even keel. A faint trace of coal smoke hung over the inlet. "There's somebody aboard!" Mary exclaimed.

The dogs scenting the smoke sensed a rest and quickened their pace. Mary rode the sled and Tim ran beside it. "It's the *Polar Night* all right," the girl said. "I'm afraid there won't be much salvage next summer."

He nodded, his eyes on the *Polar Night*. This might well be an index of what to expect at Barrow and elsewhere. As they stopped near the whaler a man came to the rail and stared. He said nothing for several seconds. "If you're men!" he screamed suddenly. "For God's sake, speak."

"I'm Tim Banning," Tim answered. "This is Mary Ridley."

"Now the poor fellow will be positive he's crazy," the girl said, "Tim Banning and Mary Ridley would never travel together."

The man laid his hands on the rail and continued to stare. His teeth were clamped down hard on a pipestem, and suddenly this snapped and the bowl fell to the snow. Tim threw back his parka hood and grinned to reassure the man.

"Pull off your mittens," the man directed, "and let me feel your warm hands." He grabbed Tim's right hand in both his, and rubbed it, and there was hysteria in his eyes. "Even a Banning is an angel from heaven," he said. "Even a Banning,"

"Not Banning," Tim answered, "but an officer of the Revenue Cutter *Aurora*."

"So the Gov'ment didn't forget us?" he said. We've argued a lot about that." He was hardly aware of Mary's presence as he tried to pour out the story of a winter's suffering, suspense and hardship into a few sentences. "We laid money the Bannings would try and do something for their men; and the Ridleys would worry about their ships, but we couldn't agree on the Gov'ment. You're needed. You was needed a month ago—three months ago. Come below."

A half dozen men lay listlessly on their bunks. "The Gov'ment sent Lieutenant Banning," the man with Tim said. "Don't look at him like that. It's true. And Mary Ridley's with him. A whole herd of reindeer is on the way."

They sat up, still hardly daring to believe, and watched Tim strip off his parka. "What's to be done?" Tim asked.

"You'd better look at Pete's arm," one of them said, "Tell him about it, Norm," he added, indicating the whaler who had brought Tim to the cabin.

"He got his hand frozen," Norm explained. "We 've done what we could, but I'm afraid it ain't enough. I won't tell him you're a Banning, though."

"Why not?"

"Most whalers in the Ridley fleet are learned to hate Sulphur-bottom's tribe, and don't trust 'em," Norm said.

Norm escorted Tim to a cabin dimly lit by a smoky candle. A man, half mad with pain, lay on a bunk. "You've gotta do somethin' boys," he gasped. "If you'll give me a gun I'll—"

"He's been wantin' a gun more'n a week now," Norm told Tim.

While Norm held the candle close, Tim unbandaged Pete's arm. It was a frightful sight, discolored and enormously swollen. "I'm a lieutenant from the *Aurora*, Pete," Tim explained, "sent here by the Government to do what I can."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I know what you're goin' to say next," Pete said thickly. "It's got to come off. The hand, maybe some of the forearm, maybe all of it's got to come off."

"Yes, Pete, it has," Tim said quietly.

There was a long silence. "Queer," Pete mused, "but there're times when a man has to face it. He can't get around a situation. He can't dodge it. There's only one course—straight ahead. All right, Lieutenant. And I'm the best man with a whale gun in the Ridley fleet."

"And you can still be the best man with a whale gun in the Ridley fleet," Tim said, understanding what was in Pete's mind.

"Would you leave a —piece below the elbow?" Pete managed to request. "I once knew a man who'd been left a stub below the elbow. It was handy —handy to hang things on."

Tim swore softly and left the room. He searched the ship for anything that might serve as surgical instruments. Norm brought him a hacksaw and a butcher knife.

Many a successful operation had been performed in the whaling fleet with no more; performed, too, by masters who knew nothing of surgery. And Tim had witnessed several. He didn't relish lashing Pete to a table and proceeding without an anesthetic, so he returned to the sled and searched through the supplies he had taken from the *Audacious*.

Mary, who had been slowly circling the schooner on a tour of inspection, joined him. Briefy he explained the situation. "Those men in there are pretty shaky—poor food, no medicine and loss of morale. How brave are you, Mary?"

"When I started on this trek," she answered, "I made up my mind I'd find courage enough to do anything needed to be done. What do you want?"

"I think there's chloroform in these supplies," he said. "I want you to administer it, if you will."

"I read once, how it was done," she answered. "I'll do my best. And if I faint, or something, just push me out of the way. Don't stop to revive me."

Fate was having rare sport, she decided, in throwing them into crisis after crisis. One week Tim was hunting her brother; the next, standing beside her trying to save a Ridley man's life.

A half hour later she leaned over Pete and asked, "Are you asleep? Are you asleep?" Pete didn't answer and Tim went ahead. It was a grim business, there in the gloomy cabin, with oil lamps casting weird shadows and the silence broken by the hacksaw cutting through the bone.

Tim worked fast, but it seemed an interminable task. He put a gut ligature on the large artery, touched the small veins with a caustic and made free use with Iodoform when he bandaged the stub. Tim's hand fell on Mary's shoulder at last. "Good work, Mary," he said.

"If you don't mind," she answered, "I think I'll go outside for some air."

"You might just as well dress for the trail," Tim said, "We are going on. There's no telling what is ahead of us. Things may be worse than we imagine. I'll leave instructions and medicine here and will be ready in a half hour."

THEY traveled in a trance the remainder of the day. Everything seemed unreal—a vague dream having neither beginning nor ending. They were within striking distance of their final goal now, and they tried to shake

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off the spell, but it persisted day after day until Mary saw a black patch on the ice dead ahead. It was the first thing to relieve the monotony since they had left the *Polar Night* .

The patch became men as they drew near. Beyond the men Tim saw a schooner near the shore. He stopped and leveled his glasses on the craft. "Your *Susan R,* Mary" he informed the girl, "and from her position, she's safe. It'll be an easy matter to haul her clear when the ice goes out."

He continued on to the men. They had cleared away the snow, and were breaking up the wreckage of a whaler lost many years previous. Gaunt ribs showed above the ice and snow. The fur-clad men suggested wolves chewing on the rib bones of some strange monster. Improvised sleds on the ice carried some of the salvaged wood, which no doubt was intended for fuel.

The men stared in amazement when they learned Tim and Mary were from the south and not a pair of wandering whalers. A storm of questions followed. Tim gave the *Susan R's* master a small pack of mail, and was told that the *Mary Ridley* was safely wintering thirty miles to the eastward. "The Ridley company's *Endeavor* is in a bad way fifteen miles beyond the *Mary,*" the captain added.

Tim noticed a man who semed none too easy under his gaze. He was a big man, wearing a worn parka, and his face was almost concealed by a bandage which reeked with drugs. "What's the matter with your face?"

"Froze it," the other answered, his voice muffled by the bandages and his eyes taking on a willed calmness that aroused Tim's interest. "It's getting along all right now."

"What's your name?"

"Brennan."

"One of your men?" Tim asked the captain.

"No," the latter answered. "A trapper. He'd heard the fleet was stranded. He had a lot of tea, which he thought we'd be glad to get. He needed a few things we had. He got frosted freighting his tea here."

"Let me have a look at your face, Brennan," Tim said. "Maybe I've got something that will help things along."

"If that's an order, all right," Brennan answered, a little uneasily, "but I'd sooner you didn't touch it. I fixed it up two days ago, and when the bandages are pulled off, it starts my face bleeding again."

"Well, it's your face," Tim said. He turned to the skipper again. "What of the Banning whalers? We've seen the *Audacious.*"

"Old Sulphur-bottom is playing in his usual luck. The *Wanderer* and the *Aleutian* went down," the skipper answered. "But the *Pearl, Bangor* and *Elsie* can haul out, with a little luck. If he had the *Audacious* to give them a towline when the ice begins to go, I'd say he would certainly save them."

"Well, good luck," Tim said as he prepared to resume the trek. "There'll be reindeer along soon, and some supplies. And Surgeon Newton," he added for the benefit of the man with the frozen face.

Obviously the *Susan R's* crew was sick and discouraged, but their physical condition was so much better than the *Polar Night's* crew, Tim felt almost cheerful. It was amazing what men could endure; they seemed to summon up fresh strength when they learned food and assistance was on the way. In the case of both crews Tim had seen hope light their eyes when they were told that the Overland Expedition was a reality.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mary, sitting on the sled, was so silent he wondered if her courage was at last weakening. "Buck up," he urged. "We'll sight your namesake sometime tomorrow."

"Of course," she answered. "And that means we split up, doesn't it? Tim, I've been trying to place the man with the frozen face. There is something familiar about him—something about his mannerisms. I've seen him somewhere. Probably he is a trader who has boarded our ships when I've been with them. But if so, why didn't he recognize me?"

Tim nodded. "I'd like to know the answer to that." As they pushed on, he wondered if Brennan was a man to be reckoned with in the future; but probably their suspicions were the result of tired nerves.

CHAPTER XVI

BANNING, BEWARE

MARY RIDLEY, running ahead of the team, rounded a headland and waved frantically at Tim. He knew that she had sighted the whaler. His eyes on her small, excited figure, he was filled with a sudden amazement at what this girl had done. It had required something more than Ridley hardiness and a knowledge of the North to carry her through the perilous, exhausting trek.

He demanded a little more of the dogs and managed to overtake her. Ordinary prudence and caution demanded that he be present when this business rival boarded her own vessel. Besides, he wanted to catch the feel of the atmosphere when he arrived; from it he hoped to judge whether he would receive co-operation or hindrance from the Ridley whalers in the weeks to come.

A single man was visible as they drew near, but a moment later the *Mary Ridley's* rail was lined with men, looming large in their furs.

A ladder extended from deck to the ice and when Mary scrambled up, Tim was at her heels. The whaler's master gazed in disbelief. "You, Mary!" he shouted. "Well, I'll be—" Whatever it was he would be was choked back when he realized the Ridley representative was a lady.

Then the nerve which had brought Mary through week after week suddenly quit her. She slumped and would have fallen if Tim had not caught her arm. Lifting her sagging form, he followed the master to his cabin.

"Maybe she needs a doctor," the master said, "and there isn't any. Man! Man! I never expected anything like this."

"I'll be doctor this time," Tim said. He stripped off his parka and the master received his second jolt of the day. His face purpled and his fists clenched.

"You! You—Tim Banning!" he thundered. "I'll—"

"You're talking to Lieutenant Banning of the Revenue Cutter *Aurora*," Tim cut in, "so keep your shirt on."

The master ran to a cabin and pounded on the door. "Hey, Bill!" He bellowed. 'Get up and dress. Your sister's here and Tim Banning is with her."

"Bill Ridley!" Tim exclaimed. He was astonished as the master had been a moment before. But he was also relieved. If Bill was here, then obviously he couldn't be miles away threatening the herd.

BILL came out of the cabin, pulling on his clothing. "Where's Mary? What's she doing up here? What's wrong with her?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tim stared at him in silence. Bill Ridley must have heard from the natives that Mary was in the North. Probably he had seen her when he had tried to ambush Tim on the ice. This was a nice little piece of acting.

Mary opened her eyes and looked into her brother's handsome, anxious face. "Bill!" she exclaimed. "I didn't expect you. I thought you were miles and miles—"

"I was sent north to look after Ridley interests," he interrupted, "and —I know. You'd heard stories about my drinking, going native and—all that. You didn't depend on me, so you came. I guess I can't blame you. But I'm not so far down as you heard. I'm married to a fine girl and —"

"I know, Bill. I know," Mary said.

"You met Arnaretauk?" Beads of sweat stood out on his head. "You were in my cabin?" He whirled on his heels and advanced on Tim. "Banning, that's your work. You wanted to get even with the Ridleys."

"No, Bill," Mary said, "he had nothing to do with it. I learned where your cabin was, and made my way to it. It was on the trail the reindeer herd was taking. I stopped." She drew a deep breath, and avoided looking at him. "I was there, Bill, when your son was born. Why—did you leave her?"

"My son," he said in a strained voice. "So it was a boy?"

"Another Ridley, Bill," Mary said. "He looks like you and not like—a breed."

"She can't have much native blood in her," Bill said slowly. "She's more like a white girl. She has imagination and she's afraid of things no native girl is afraid of. And she dragged me out of the muck and tried to make something of me. She was the only one except Jerry Deacon and you who ever did. But where were her people?"

"You knew the native superstition about childbirth," Mary said. "You knew they would leave her."

Bill Ridley swore furiously. "I thought I'd knocked that out of 'em. I talked my head off to prove it was nonsense."

"You can't change human nature in a few months, Bill," she said. "Tim Banning was there, too. He forced a native to remain. And that native died at Antuk's feet. It's a long story and it almost wrecked the Overland Expedition. Arnaretauk is all right, Bill, and her people are back."

"Which brings us to an official matter, Ridley," Tim Banning said. "And keep this in mind, I'm acting in my official capacity and not as a whaler owner."

Bill Ridley's eyes narrowed and flamed with a hard light. "You think I'll believe that?" His lips drew tight across his even white teeth.

"You are under arrest for murdering two of my herders," Tim said. "We won't go into details now. You are more familiar with them than I am. I'm taking you to Barrow."

"What're you talking about?" Bill demanded, a mirthless smile on his lips. "I knew the Overland Expedition was coming. A man named Scalzo told me. But I never got within sight of the herd."

"Mary saw you kill one of my herders," Tim said, evenly. "I was about to kill you when she threw herself onto me and spoiled my aim. The dead herder's brother went out to avenge his death. You killed him with his own harpoon."

"And you saw this, Mary?" Bill asked.

She did not answer and Tim pushed his advantage. "She recognized you;

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ran after you and called your name," he said. "You were wearing your parka with the ermine hood."

Bill Ridley laughed in Tim Banning's face. "There goes your case," he shouted. "I used to have a parka like that, but I haven't seen it in months. It looks as if Mary and you would have to swear you saw my face."

"But we didn't," Mary said quickly. "We only saw the ermine parka hood." Relief filled her face. She glanced swiftly at Tim, knowing he did not readily admit defeat.

BUT while Tim was not easily defeated, neither was he going to butt his head against a stone wall. "You're right, Ridley," he said, "neither of us saw your face. The job is to prove whose head was in that parka hood when the herders were killed. And that head's going to fall. Mary, I've had your things brought aboard. Are you loaning me your dog team for the remainder of the trip to Barrow?"

"Yes," she answered.

"One more thing, Ridley." Tim studied the big man. "I'm a Government man with a job to do. Are you going to co-operate?"

"As long as you are a Revenue Cutter lieutenant you'll get our co-operation," Bill answered. "But when you turn Banning whaling man, we'll fight you. And, sooner or later, you'll turn Banning whaling man."

"Send me a report, at Barrow, of the condition of your men, what stores you have on hand and your needs," Tim said. He walked over to the bunk and grasped Mary's hand. "Goodbye, Mary. I'd sooner mush with you than any man I've ever known." His eyes softened and he smiled.

"Good luck, Lieutenant Tim Banning," she answered.

"Thanks." He grinned. There would be no luck wished for Banning, the whaling man.

Bill Ridley closed the door behind Tim, then sat down beside his sister's bunk and talked until she was ready to sleep. There was much to be said of things that had happened in the past, and even more of what might happen in the future.

When Mary was asleep, Bill returned to his room. He pulled a parka with an ermine hood out of a canvas bag. He looked at the garment a long time, and his fingers toyed almost gently with the fine seams in the ermine hood. Only native women could sew such seams.

"I hate to do it, he said softly. "But it's dangerous. It could hang me." He poked his finger through a bullet hole in the hood, then rolling it into a tight ball, carried the parka to the stove and stuffed it in. Flames hissed as the fur singed, a trace of acrid smoke puffed into the room, the stove roared for a moment.

Suddenly Bill Ridley charged through the cabin door and scrambled up a ladder to the poop deck. Belatedly he realized he had made a serious mistake—the wind was carrying the fumes of burning fur straight to Tim Banning.

He leveled a pair of binoculars on the Revenue Cutter man's bulky figure. There was no doubt of it—Tim Banning had halted his dogs and was sniffing.

TIM sniffed a couple of times more for good measure. It was not difficult to identify the fumes of burning fur and hide. He nodded to himself; that would be the end of the parka

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the ermine head. That fixed it.

As Tim pushed on, weighing the words exchanged in the cabin between Ridley and himself, he speculated on the extent of his rival's co-operation. He needed it, of course. Men battling Nature had little enough chance of success when presenting a united front. Fighting among themselves they had almost no chance at all. But Tim could do nothing but wait for Bill Ridley to prove himself ally or enemy.

He fastened the dogs to ice toggles and was squatting over the stove when five men approached. They were traveling light— sleeping bags and a few pounds of provisions in packs on their shoulders. It was evident from their build and rolling gait that they were sea men. One Tim recognized as a sailor from the *Mary Ridley*.

"We followed you," one of them said. "My name is Johns." The man introduced the others. Tim nodded toward each, his eyes on Johns.

"We're Banning men now," Johns informed him. "We're casting our fortunes with the Bannings. We've heard that your family takes care of its people. But we never thought they'd send one of their number into the Arctic in the dead of winter."

"I'm a Revenue Cutter officer," Tim answered.

"That's what we're supposed to know," Johns said, grinning. "But we've figgered another answer—a smart move. The Bannings take care of their people and Uncle Sam pays the bill."

"I'm beginning to understand," Tim said. "It looks to you as if the Banning whalers would get the tender meat and the others would feed on the gristle?"

"That's one way of putting it," Johns said.

"Understand this, everybody is on all fours. No one is going to skim any cream," Tim said coldly. "And there is another thing I want understood now. I'll not allow men moving from ship to ship, or from ship to shore, without permission. We'll be spending half our time sending rescue expeditions to frosted sailors. Whenever a man leaves his ship of his own accord, he'll go back the way he came."

"Then you ain't letting us join one of your whalers?" Johns asked. "We're five of the best men in the whalin' fleet."

"The Bannings don't need you," Tim said tersely. "You'd better start back now."

Johns hestitated, conferred briefly with his companions; then they all headed for the *Mary Ridley*. "We'll make Banning sweat blood before this is over with," Johns growled.

"You're damned right we will," one of them agreed. "But what're going to tell Bill Ridley? He's a squawman, but tougher'n the hubs of Hell."

"I'll talk to Bill Ridley, if he's missed us," Johns said.

Bill Ridley had missed them, and he was waiting when they came over the side of the whaler. With hands half clenched he advanced, apparently ready to take all of them on at once. "Where're you men been?" he demanded.

"Tim Banning offered us better pay and lifetime jobs with his company if we'd quit ship," Johns explained humbly. "It's his idea to get the best men in the fleet on Banning ships. He'd have a better chance of freeing his own ships; and if you lost yours because they was manned by poor men, he'd be that much ahead."

Johns paused, awaiting comment.

"Go on," Bill ordered. "And God

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

help you if you don't give me all of the truth."

"We're sick and hungry, kind of," Johns continued, "and with him distributin' the Government grub, his proposition to quit the *Mary Ridley* looked pretty fine, so we started to trail him. Then we got talkin' and it seemed like we were pullin' a stinkin' trick on the Ridleys. So we turned around and come back."

"Get for'd, all of you," Bill roared. He knocked Johns spinning and hoisted another on the toe of his boot. "You'll forfeit plenty of pay for this. And whatever else is due the Ridleys I'll collect from Tim Banning personally."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Army in Feathers

PIGEONS front! Beaks up, there! Get that big chest in, you, and smooth down your right wing. Snappy, now: spread wings; prepare for flight!

Thus some harassed drill sergeant, no doubt, in the coming days of mobilization for homing pigeons. Some hundred and fifty thousand of these stubborn travelers were enlisted by the Allies in the first World War; today the American Army alone has ten thousand ready for service, and can jack the ante up to three hundred thousand in the first two weeks of war. They're fine dispatch riders, these pigeons; a good homer has a cruising range of a hundred to six hundred miles bee-line at up to eighty miles an hour, depending on the wind.

Now the Army has a system known as the single corps procurement plan for pigeons. It's a secret between the Army and the country's pigeon fanciers; but on M-day the recruiting of feathers will proceed just as smoothly and efficiently as the recruiting of men.

Naturally, it's going to be as unpatriotic and treasonable to hunt pigeons as it is to take pictures of gun emplacements or put a bomb under the colonel's horse. Legislation is being cooked up in New York, in New Jersey, and at Washington that will take care of that. Then anybody who takes a pot shot at a pigeon is likely to find himself up against a five-hundred-dollar fine or a year in prison—or both.

The Army hasn't said anything so far about those unproductive pigeons that loaf around the New York Public Library and St. Patrick's Cathedral, waiting for handouts. If and when war comes, they might be branded as vagrants and slackers, and herded into an aviary at Leavenworth.

—*Skippy McMullin*

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Jest of Hamarath

An Argosy Oddity

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Author of "The Haji's Miracle," "The Fool of the Regiment," etc.

THIS is the story of what happened to a man who robbed an Indian temple. His name was William Stewart Lutton, and the temple he robbed was a temple of Hamarath, a few miles from Agra, that had been disused for many centuries.

William Stewart Lutton happened on the place by pure accident. He had been out riding and had lost his way. He was pleased rather than annoyed; for he was in India purely as a globe-trotter and he knew that the best way of seeing a country as it really is is to get yourself lost.

So he rode on, humming and not in the least perturbed by the thought that he would be late for breakfast at his hotel, and taking a keen interest in his surroundings, until he found that the track he had been following ended in a glade where grass and flowers grew in great profusion.

Under the overhanging trees there were irregular remains of walls, and there were stones and blocks of marble and broken columns lying in the undergrowth proving that there must once have been a building of considerable size in this beautiful spot where nature now rioted unchecked.

"Desolate," the stock word when speaking of a ruin, certainly did not apply in this instance. As Lutton sat there on his pony he was struck by the number of birds and butterflies and monkeys that seemed to infest the place. They were a noisy, cheerful congregation, singing and chattering and disporting themselves in the sunshine as if the very fecundity of their surroundings had made them drunk with joy.

Lutton had a feeling as if he had strayed by accident into a party of revelers. Even his pony seemed infected by the general gaiety. It threw up its head and shied skittishly at a fat old idol sprawling in the grass.

Lutton rebuked it sharply. He was earnest and intelligent as all young men are nowadays, and there was something in the atmosphere of that glade of which he disapproved strongly. Perhaps I should rather say of which he felt scornful. He felt alien and superior among all this pagan happiness.

Curiosity, however, led him to dismount and explore the place on foot. Indian religion was one of the subjects he had studied, and he very soon identified the temple as having been dedi-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cated to Hamarath, the Hindu god of laughter. In fact, he found a mud statue of Hamarath himself, his head flung back, his hands clasping his fat tummy and his whole attitude redolent of roguish amusement.

And in the grass in front of Hamarath Lutton found a skull. Skulls as a rule are gruesome objects, but this one wasn't. Lutton picked it up without the slightest feeling of awe or repulsion.

Its grin was as infectious as that of Hamarath himself. It looked as if it wanted to say that death was the best joke of all and that everything was all right if only people wouldn't worry.

WHEN Lutton eventually left the temple he carried the skull with him. It would be a trophy, something to show people when he got home. And it was a curiosity, too. A skull with a really merry expression.

He had no guilty feeling of having committed desecration as he rode away. Somehow he felt that nobody minded his having taken the skull.

On the contrary; the atmosphere of suppressed laughter that was not in the least malignant seemed to increase. The birds sang their loudest, the monkeys threw mad somersaults among the branches, butterflies danced like tipsy fairies; and when he looked over his shoulder he saw Hamarath like a jolly old priest up to his neck in flowers.

. . . Three weeks later Lutton walked up the gangway of the P. and O. *Oravia* at Bombay. He had done India as a conscientious globe-trotter should: he had seen all her marvels from the Taj Mahal to the turtles at Howrah; he had ridden muleback in Dardistan and photographed a Gond funeral feast; and he was now going back to bore his stay-at-home friends with tales of his experiences.

Had he the skull with him? Oh, yes, he had the skull; but if anyone is expecting to hear that the skull had harmed him in any way that person is wrong.

He was feeling better than he had ever felt before. In high spirits and bursting with health. And so far from being jaded by the heat—and everyone else was complaining Bombay had never been known to be so like an oven—he was perfectly cool.

Indeed, he felt quite scornful of the other perspiring people he saw about him. They were wearing tussore suits while he—an unseasoned globe-trotter whom one might have expected to be overcome—was perfectly cool in the ordinary serge suit he had donned that morning.

Shorts and open necks forsooth! He stood in the full blaze of the sun as unconcerned as if it had been an English summer afternoon. Fitness, he told himself. It was a wonderful thing to be fit.

His bearer placed a garland of flowers round his neck, kissed his feet and wept; for that is how the East always takes leave of the West. Lutton shook his bearer's hand, gave him a tip that would have bought fifty garlands, and went in search of the purser.

They had given him a single cabin on the boat deck. It was a nice cabin with an electric fan whirring above a block of ice and windscuttles protruding from the two portholes.

CURIOUSLY enough it was while he was in that cabin giving instructions to the steward that Lutton for the first time that day felt inclined to agree with the people who were exclaiming about the heat.

While he was opening his suitcases and arranging his belongings he felt

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quite uncomfortably warm. And even when he had taken off his coat he didn't feel the relief he had expected.

However, he completed the task. There was a shelf above his bunk on which he arranged the books he intended to read on the voyage, and then he looked for something fairly heavy that might serve as a book-end.

The skull caught his eye. Deciding that such a polished, friendly, smiling skull couldn't upset the steward in any way he placed it at the end of the row of books as a prop.

Then he stood back to see the effect, thinking to himself as he did so that the current of air driven by the fan across the block of ice was like the glow from a furnace. But the skull looked as if it were relishing the heat. And its smile was so infectious that Lutton for once in a way was moved to chuckle.

"It's hotter where you are, old chap," he said facetiously. "Never mind, we're both going to a cold country."

The skull grinned in a way that the feebleness of the joke hardly merited. Suddenly Lutton felt that the cabin was almost unbearably stuffy and put his coat on and went out. It was much cooler out on deck in the sunlight.

The other passengers, however, didn't seem to find it so; and he was conscious of envious glances from people sprawling on deck-chairs under awnings, wearing a very minimum of clothing and looking as if they were on the verge of heat-stroke.

And then he had a minor misadventure that rather spoiled his satisfaction. It happened when he had gone into the smoking lounge—which, like his cabin, was hotter than the open deck despite a great many fans—and had ordered a gin sling. For the steward to whom he gave the order was an imbecile.

Yes, an imbecile. Who else would have mixed a gin sling with boiling water? Lutton had scalded his mouth before realizing the mistake. He was too self-controlled to give way to profanity, but he reprimanded the man severely.

When he went to wash his hands before tiffin he found another cause of annoyance. Because of what must have been a defect in the ship's plumbing the hot tap ran cold; the water from the cold tap scalded his hands.

THOSE things were only the beginnings. There followed a succession of similar incidents which made Lutton, although he felt perfectly well, suspect himself of running a temperature.

The soup and coffee he had been given at dinner had tasted so cold in his mouth they had made his teeth ache. Conversely, a slice of iced melon had burned his tongue.

When he had complained to the head waiter the latter had looked at him curiously. So had his fellow diners who, apparently, had found no reason for complaint.

After dinner it felt much warmer to him on deck than it had in the morning. His cabin, however, was chilly. Certainly he had a temperature. He got out his thermometer and smoked it religiously for three minutes.

The reading was at once reassuring and puzzling. It was ninety-eight, four; perfectly normal. But the cabin was growing colder. He got up shivering and switched off the fan.

To reach the fan he had to stretch across the block of ice. As he did that he was aware of a pleasant glow of heat as if he were near a fire. And it seemed to emanate from the block of ice.

Hot ice! He touched it with his hand.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Next moment there was a yell of agony and he was hopping about the cabin sucking his burned fingers.

"I'm bewitched," he said to himself. "Either that or I'm going mad."

. . . It was some days before he could adjust his mind to what had happened. But at last he realized that for some extraordinary reason the thermal condition of his body had been as it were reversed. In a temperature sense he was upside-down.

His bodily reaction to the heat of other bodies was the precise opposite of what his reason told him it should be; alone of all living creatures in the world he felt cold as heat and heat as cold.

Fear of being thought mad made him keep his fantastic secret to himself. To do so wasn't as difficult as might be imagined, since what the other passengers were doing to keep cool he had to do to keep warm; and his actions were, therefore, as it were, in step with theirs.

For instance, when they had reached the Red Sea he lay half-naked under a fan and drank copiously of iced liquids. And nobody guessed he was doing those things to save himself from being frozen.

For—from Lutton's upside-down viewpoint—the Red Sea was abominably cold. To stand in the sun for a second uncovered was to risk frost bite; the breeze from the African coast went through his numbed body like a knife.

And perhaps the most irksome thing of all was trying to remember when talking to other passengers that it was the heat he was complaining of and not the cold.

The Mediterranean brought him a certain measure of relief. He was neither too hot nor too cold; he was just comfortable. But after Gibraltar when the *Oravia* was steaming up the bay in the teeth of a westerly gale he began to feel uncomfortably hot.

Made wise by experiment he put on warmer clothes and took to having hot baths and hot drinks. He was delighted when the ship's heating apparatus was brought into use. To keep himself cool he sat near the radiator in his cabin just as a short time before he had been keeping himself warm by crouching over a block of ice.

And one stifling day in the English Channel when there were snowflakes in the air he found the heat so overpowering that he got the chief to take him down to the stokehole, which to him felt like a refrigerator.

Despite his overcoats, his mufflers and his gloves he found Tilbury like an oven. He was panting in the taxi that drove him to his hotel, and the first order he gave when he got there was for a big fire to be lighted in his bedroom.

When the flames were fairly roaring up the chimney the room got moderately cool. After several hot whisky toddies which were most grateful to his parched mouth, he summoned up enough energy to unpack his belongings.

The skull was in the first suitcase he opened. He had hardly noticed the thing during the voyage; but it struck him now that its smile was even more roguish than it had been before. It looked as if it were fairly bursting with laughter at the success of a practical joke.

It almost winked.

While he held it in his hands it came to him that it must be the cause of what had happened. He was the victim of one of Hamarath's jokes. No mental specialist or doctor could help him.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was only one way by which he could regain normalcy.

A FEW weeks later he was going shivering down the gangway of another P. and O. at Bombay. India was so cold it made him almost regret the heat of England. But although the Taj Mahal hotel, with its warm fans and its punkahs tempted him, he didn't tarry in Bombay.

He caught the first express to Agra. In the first class carriage he almost succumbed to the cold, but at last he reached his destination. Within an hour he was at the glade where the ruined temple was.

It was just as it had been before. The birds, the butterflies and the monkeys welcomed him with a deafening uproar. Hamarath grinned at him above the flowers. The whole place seemed to dance and throb with merriment in the brilliant sunshine.

Lutton walked shivering up to Hamarath and laid the skull with his numbed hands on the exact spot whence he had taken it.

Immediately he did that he felt the grateful heat of the sun falling upon his chilled body. It warmed him through and through, penetrating to his very heart.

When it got there it was as if something that had been there melted, and he threw back his head and laughed as he had not laughed since he was a little child.

DO YOU REMEMBER
THE BLACK TOM EXPLOSION?

Even if you do not . . . you've more than likely heard of it. ***Think for a moment!*** How did sabotage agents know when and where to set that earth-shaking blast? . . . How were they able to sneak through the guards? . . . Who supplied them with funds and explosives? Well that's just one example of how foreign spies can strike at the railroad industry . . . ***or any industry*** . . . in time of war!

Railroads are prime targets for spies. If these elusive shadows of men can clog the vital veins of a nation's supply it is of extreme advantage to their homelands.

Stories of the daring, exciting exploits of spies are among the most interesting you have ever read. Enjoy the best of them in a great new magazine of true and fiction spy stories.

FAMOUS SPY STORIES

A RED STAR ***QUALITY*** MAGAZINE

now on all newsstands - 15¢

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Whisper Trail

Shifting the gun to his left hand, Spike was firing before his grip tightened on the butt

By WALT COBURN

CRAFTY Jess Claggett and his Box C boys think they have an easy victim in the amiable, be-spectacled Montanan, Spike Lawler, who is buying the Box C. But Lawler sees through Claggett's trick of holding out cattle; furthermore, he demonstrates his ability to take care of himself by heaving the Box C foreman, Lazar, into a cactus bush.

Later in the town of San Onofre it becomes apparent to Spike who the real brain is behind the Box C skullduggery. It's Judge Ambrose, a smart lawyer and a dangerous man with a gun. The apparently honest ranchers, Pod Gifford and Shane McTeague, are completely under his control, and so is Jess Claggett. The last, however, is no longer useful to Ambrose; the judge makes arrangements with Lazar to get rid of him.

KNOWING how dangerous Judge Ambrose is, Spike Lawler nevertheless signs the papers which deed him the Box C. Furthermore, Spike, Claggett and Ambrose make up a ninety-thousand-dollar jackpot which is to be collected by the man still living at the end of thirty days.

Spike Lawler has a curious hobby; he's an ardent juggler, trickshooting artist and knife thrower. That night there is to be a show at the San Onofre Opera House, and when the professional juggler gets himself hopelessly drunk, Spike agrees to fill in. His audience is composed of San Onofre's ranking citizens and scoundrels, and of a squad of tough cowboys led by Bobcat Boggs, Spike Lawler's faithful lieutenant.

The first installment of this two-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in last week's Argosy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPIKE performs his acts with great success, unperturbed—until Sheila McTeague volunteers as target in the trick shooting number. Spike has developed a lively interest in this pretty, high-spirited daughter of Rancher McTeague's, and now he's scared. But he goes through with it. Having demonstrated his skill to a stunned audience, he steps outside the theater with Sheila, who is badly shaken.

Jess Claggett finds the two together there. Drunk and crazy with jealousy, he charges Spike, and a moment later there's a knockdown fight in progress. Then, unnoticed by the crowd that has gathered, a horseman rides up, takes a shot at the brawlers, and escapes. The bullet gets Spike in the leg just as he is finishing a thorough job on Jess Claggett. . . .

CHAPTER VI

SHAMROCK LADY

SPIKE LAWLER rode alone the next evening to Sheila McTeague's horse ranch on the head of Cougar Creek. She raised the best addle stock in the country. Her steeldust stud and her brood mares were a gift from her father. She broke her own private horses and had three of the best bronc handlers in Arizona making cow horses of each year's crop of three-year-old geldings.

"You smelled apple pie," Sheila told him. She was sitting on the top of the pole horse-corral watching one of her bronc riders work. "How's the leg?"

"The leg ain't so bad but what it could be cured by a hunk of your pie," he told her, "but it's business that fetches me here. I'm in the market for enough broke horses to mount my crew of six cowboys.

"Mebby it's still news here at your ranch that my outfit was set afoot. Somebody drifted the Box C remuda across the Border into Mexico. A couple of the boys have gone to make a try at recoverin' the horses. Meanwhile we haven't a change of horses at the ranch. And the sign tells me that some hard ridin' cowhands are busy driftin' my cattle in all directions. Name your own figure on about seventy-five head of saddle horses."

"So they've already started givin' you your trimmin', have they, Spike? I had a notion that there'd be some sort of dirty work at the crossroads. Range news travels fast. I'm sorry I can't sell you any horses, pardner."

Spike's grin became forced, stiff lipped. He nodded slowly.

"You're Shane McTeague's daughter. I had no right to expect anything else. But that won't spoil my appetite for dried apple pie. How about it, ma'am?"

Sheila smiled quickly and climbed down to the ground. She took up a few minutes admiring Spike's Montana-bred horse.

"He's Morgan bred and a little heavy for the rough country," Spike told her, "and he ain't as young as he was five years ago. He's sort of pensioned. I fetched a carload of 'em with me when I left Montana. But nobody but me ever rode 'em. They came along with me just for the train ride and to eat their heads off on good pasture. I aim to ride 'em just enough to keep 'em happy."

Sheila rubbed the nose of the big brown gelding with her cheek and her eyes were bright when she smiled at Spike.

"You wouldn't be too proud to turn horse thief would you, Spike?"

"Horse thief?"

"Big Dud rode out from town this morning with a bill of attachment Judge Ambrose had made out against my horses. Shane's in debt to Ambrose and I'm on Shane McTeague's note. Shane couldn't or wasn't allowed to pay off his debt. So Ambrose has slapped an attachment on all my horses.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Big Dud has 'em impounded in my horse pasture.

"That's the one and only reason I can't mount you and your crew. That's why I can't sell so much as a week-old colt. But there'll be a moon tonight and only Big Dud Dudley and a couple of his deputies on guard. I know what I'd do if I were in your fix. Now let's tackle that pie."

"Lady," said Spike grinning widely, "you're a white man!"

She helped him put up his horse, and they ate pie in the kitchen. The old Chinese cook denied Spike's accusation that he had made the dried apple pie.

"Missy Sheila make 'em. She make pie. She break bronk. All same good fust-class job."

SHEILA took Spike into the front of the long, low roofed old adobe house. It was built in a square around a patio that boasted the only fruit trees and fountain in that part of Arizona. She pointed to the picture of her father and mother, taken on their wedding day.

"My mother died when I was a kid. Shane raised me like I was a boy. Let me run wild. Gave me everything I claimed, and I was a grabby sort of kid. He staked me to this old Mexican ranch and a bunch of horses. I've made it pay, even if I am fussy about selling a horse.

"There are men like Big Dud or Lazar or Ambrose who couldn't buy the sorriest horse in my remuda for any money. Pod Gifford treats his horses like an old maid treats her cats. He can top my bunch any time and get 'em for what it's cost me to raise and break 'em. Shane insists on swapping for his.

"Once he swapped me a new kitchen range for a gelding he wanted. Another time he fetched me that piano and took away a colt that wasn't worth the price of a piano stool. Last week he left that Mexican serape and took three of my best cow horses away with him.

"There are twelve head of horses in the Box C remuda that wear my Shamrock horse brand. I gave 'em to Jess Claggett for birthday and Christmas presents."

Spike nodded. "You like Jess Claggett a lot, don't you?"

"I liked him enough to say 'yes' when he asked me to marry him." Sheila's tanned face flushed a little. "Jess was a little drunk last night and when he's drunk he can be ornery. I treated him pretty badly. And he's jealous of any man who looks sideways at me. Ambrose had doublecrossed him. He found me sitting in your box at the Opera House. And when you put on that six-shooter act, that was the last straw.

"I handed him a dirty deuce with your bullet hole in it. He went hog wild. And Jess ain't the kind who goes off alone and licks his wounds. He comes back fightin' for more. Perhaps you can savvy why he hates you all the more because you saved his life when Lazar took a pot-shot at him.

"Jess stopped at the ranch between midnight and daybreak. He was cold sober and ugly tempered. We had a sort of quarrel. Jess was fighting his head like a bronc when he left here."

She paused a moment, frowning at the floor. Then she went on:

"Perhaps it was Jess who set you afoot. But my guess is that Lazar pulled the horse rustlin'. Lazar and some of his 'breed Mexican *compadres* from below the Border. Lazar is a half-breed even if he does deny it. He was the one who robbed Ambrose's office. I got a quick look at him as he high-tailed it. And no man can rob Am-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brose and stay safe north of the Border.

"Lazar was Mexico bound when he quit San Onofre. He could have taken the Box C remuda with him when he drifted. But if he did, Jess will follow him to Hell's big gates to kill him and get back his string of Shamrock horses. That's a cinch bet."

"I wouldn't doubt it," Spike remarked.

"Ambrose got the news that you'd been afoot," Sheila continued. "So he slapped that attachment on my horses, anticipating this ride of yours here to buy a new remuda. And the note he sent by Big Dud told me I'd better stay out of the Box C deal or it would go hard on Shane McTeague.

"I don't know what kind of a hold Ambrose has on Shane, but you can bet it's a dirty one."

SHEILA McTeague led the way into the patio. They sat down on an old bench under a big old hackberry tree.

"You knew all about this setup before you came here, didn't you, Spike? You played the part of a greenhorn. You wore a pair of fool spectacles with ordinary glass lenses just to help disguise yourself as an easy mark for Ambrose and Jess Claggett. Why? Or just tell me it's none of my business and I'll drop the question."

"My father died and left me a good sized outfit in Montana," Spike told her. "I saw other outfits getting sheeped-out. I sold out to a sheepman for a good price. I had money in the bank, a string of old cow ponies that didn't like the smell of sheep any better than I do. And I had old Bobtail to keep me company.

"We camped one night in the badlands with Long Henry and the Powder River Kid. They were driftin' south toward the Mexican Line. The talk around the campfire drifted south and Long Henry described this Big C range and the flim-flam game that Jess Claggett had worked on several gents that thought they were buyin' a cattle outfit cheap.

"Long Henry said that if a man could play greenhorn and get a title to the layout and was brainy and tough enough to hang onto it, he'd be gettin' a handsome lookin' chunk of the best open cow country left in the United States. He said if I wanted to tackle it he and the other boys would help me hold it.

"I loaded my horses on the train, took Bobtail along, and landed at San Onofre. I contacted Judge Ambrose and read larceny in his green eyes. I had always liked juggling and had put on a hayseed juggling act back at school. The steel rimmed specs were part of the Rube costume. I put 'em on just for a joke, took a look at myself in a mirror and kept 'em on from the time we landed at San Onofre. They fooled Ambrose. Those specs and the college-cut tweed suit I wore did the trick. He sold me the Box C outfit. Tied me up. I paid him cash and he went for the bait. Swallowed it. Hook, line and sinker."

Sheila was listening intently while Spike's pleasant voice drawled on.

"I'd studied law at college. I'd gotten a plat of this whole country from the Land Office. When he tried to hold out the lower range I threatened to back out of the deal. I wanted every acre of ground owned by Jess Claggett. I wanted the Box C brand and all the horses and cattle in that iron. Ambrose hemmed and hawed and hiked up the price and I chopped his price down to where he'd still make a nice profit if he took a notion to crook Jess Claggett—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So Judge Ambrose, acting on his power of attorney for Jess Claggett, swung the deal to suit himself. He was telling himself that I knew a little about law but I'd be easy pickin's as a greenhorn cattleman.

"Jess Claggett treated me like I was another pilgrim all set to be taken. He was a little put out when I called him on the cattle count. Lazar got tough about it and got tossed in the cactus. I think Jess was beginning to get suspicious. But he signed the papers that lost him his outfit. And I have a notion that Ambrose put pressure on him to force him to close the deal."

"Ambrose is holding a club of some kind over Jess's head," said Sheila. "Ambrose wants this whole strip of cow country. He told me, when he tried to bully me into marrying him, that he'd be the cattle king of the San Onofre country before the year was out"

Spike half started to his feet. "That slimy thing wants to marry you?"

"He's very decided about it. But keep your shirt on, Spike. You're the only person I've confided in. Shane would kill him if he guessed. So would Pod. So would Jess. But you're too level headed to go gunning for Judge Ambrose. Listen!" Sheila's hand gripped Spike's arm.

FROM the kitchen came the bulldozing voice of Big Dud Dudley, Town Marshal of San Onofre.

"Rustle me a bit of supper, Chink, or I'll drag you around by that pigtail of yours till you squeal like a rat!"

Spike grinned and got to his feet. "Here's where I take over your Shamrock remuda, Sheila. With your permission."

"I'm going to my room for a siesta. I sleep as sound as a rock."

Spike stepped into the kitchen with a six-shooter in his hand. There was a faint grin on his face, but his eyes were bleak.

"Reach for the roof, big feller. Or fill your hand with a gun. Killin' you would give me more pleasure than anything I know. Fight or quit, you big bulldozin' false alarm!"

Big Dud's face was the color of putty as he raised his big hairy hands to the level of his shoulders.

"Turn around!" snapped Spike.

Big Dud turned his back. Spike took a couple of steps forward. With his left hand he flipped the big town marshal's hat from his head. His gun barrel rapped Big Dud just above and a little behind his right ear. Big Dud dropped to the kitchen floor like a beef that has been hit between the horns with the butt of an ax.

Spike manacled the law officer's hands behind his back with his own handcuffs. He gave Big Dud's six-shooter and the keys to the handcuffs to the Chinaman who was half scared, half elated at what had happened.

Spike went through the town marshal's pockets. He found the bill of attachment for the Shamrock horses and burned it in the kitchen stove. Then he poured himself a cup of coffee and rolled a cigarette. He was finishing his coffee when Big Dud came alive. His bloodshot eyes blinked and he groaned and struggled to free his hands. Spike kicked him none too gently to his feet.

"Let's go horseback ridin', big meat." He grinned. "After you've helped me take the Shamrock remuda to the Box C ranch one of your men kin fetch you back here and the cook will set you free and give you back your gun. Or meby so you'll decide to keep right on into Mexico where you kin throw in with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your pardner Lazar. Because Ambrose don't like his men to fall down on their job, does he?"

Spike shoved the big man outside and loaded him on his horse. Leading Big Dud's horse, upon which the town marshal rode ungracefully with his hands behind his back, Spike headed for the horse pasture where the Shamrock remuda had been impounded. Two deputies lazed in the shade of the evening sun near the big pole gate.

"If they make trouble," Spike told Big Dud, "I'll gut shoot you and then make bunch quitters outa them. Sing out, mister. Tell 'em to keep their hands off their guns and take orders from Spike Lawler. Lift that sweet voice of yours, ox meat."

"Don't make no fool plays, boys!" bellowed Big Dud. "This locoed feller is rearin' to kill me! Do what he tells you!"

"It's the target shootin' gent that throwed Lazar in the cholla and whupped Jess Claggett!" said one of the deputies. "Give your orders, Lawler. We'll carry 'em out. We don't want no ruckus with no sharpshooter."

"Round up these horses," said Spike. "We're takin' 'em to the Box C ranch. Pronto, as the Mexican says it."

NOT five miles from the Shamrock horse ranch Bobtail Boggs was waiting. His round face lost its amiable look and his eyes rounded with astonishment when he recognized Big Dud riding with his hands fastened behind his back, one of his deputies leading his horse.

"Goshamighty, boss! You shot any more men?" Alarm sharpened Bobtail's wheezy voice.

"Not yet, Bobtail. But it's just the shank of the evenin'. Just relieve the boys of their guns and take the remuda on to the ranch. If these two men try to coyote on you, kill 'em. I'm takin' Big Dud along with me. I'll be at the ranch by midnight. Tell the boys to saddle fresh horses and wait for me."

Spike had roped one of the Shamrock horses back at the pasture and was now riding it. He waited until Bobtail had disarmed the two deputies and changed to a fresh horse. Then he took the bridle reins of Big Dud's horse and rode off. Bobtail had not asked him where he was going or why.

They had ridden a couple of miles when Big Dud, unable to silence his anxiety any longer, called Spike.

"Where you takin' me, Lawler?"

"We're payin' a visit to Shane McTeague. If you talk right mebby I'll knock those handcuffs off your wrists and give you a chance to lose yourself in Mexico. But if you don't talk I'm takin' you to Tucson and the Law will hang you for the murder of two men who lie buried in the Box C boothill.

"Ambrose won't be able to save your neck from the rope because he'll shove his own neck into a noose if he tries it. You're goin' to tell Shane McTeague how you and your pardner Lazar killed the two Robertson brothers who were the last suckers to buy the Box C outfit from Jess Claggett. How you decoyed the Robertsons to the Shane McTeague ranch when Shane was over in Mexico with Pod Gifford fetching over a drive of adobe cattle.

"How Lazar and you shot the two Robertsons down at Shane McTeague's corral and butchered a Box C steer and hid the brand in McTeague's haystack. Then rode up on Shane McTeague with a posse of men Ambrose hired for you. You accused McTeague of killin' that Box C beef and murderin' the two Robertsons when they caught him in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the act of skinnin' the hide off one of their steers. You needn't try to lie out of it, Dudley. I can produce an eye witness or two that watched the whole thing."

Spike had reined up and sat with his weight in one stirrup. He was grinning a little. Big Dud ran a whitish thick tongue along his dry lips. There was fear in his bloodshot eyes.

"Who seen me'n Lazar?" His voice was a harsh whisper.

"I'm akin' the questions, mister," said Spike flatly. "I'm runnin' this show. You're tellin' the truth to Shane McTeague or we'll hang you to a tree limb. You're takin' Shane McTeague out of Ambrose's debt for keeps. I was heeled with a few little facts like that when I drifted down here from Montana to buy the Box C outfit.

"I'll try to keep that red whiskered Irishman from killin' you. If you've got anything on Ambrose, spill it. You might be able to talk your way out of this tight if you can shove Ambrose's head in a hangman's rope. Think 'er over as we ride, big feller."

Spike rode on, leading Big Dud's horse, headed for Shane McTeague's M Bar ranch, on the Mexican border. The shadow of his hat hid the cunning smile on Big Dud's face and the almost triumphant glitter in his eyes.

CHAPTER VII

REACH FOR THE HIGH MOON

A COUPLE of "ketch-dogs," used by the cowpunchers to run wild cattle out of the heavy brush, set up a barking and lights in the McTeague M Bar ranch house blinked out. Spike and his prisoner rode up in the moonlight and Spike called out.

"Come out of it, McTeague! If I came here for trouble I wouldn't be draggin' this big thing along and I'd have a gun in my hand."

Spike had reined up in front of the darkened house. There was a window open and the door was swung inward and stood halfway open. From inside the darkened house came an ugly, flat toned voice.

"Lift 'em high, greenhorn! Try to coyote and I'll shoot your back full of holes! Reach for the high moon, hombre!"

It was Lazar's voice. It sounded like a death sentence now to Spike as he raised his hands. He turned his head a little and looked at Big Dud; the marshal's heavy face was set in a savage smile.

"Don't shoot 'im, Lazar," Big Dud called out. "Save him fer me."

"Por que?" demanded Lazar's voice inside the dark adobe ranch house. "Why? What kinda help were you? Where's them Shamrock horses you was braggin' about fetchin' acrost the border tonight?"

"This Lawler ketched me foul, Lazar. Knocked me on the head and stole the Shamrock cavvy. He handcuffed me like this and said he was fetchin' me here to make me talk out to Shane McTeague about the killin' of them two Robertsons. I let him ride into the trap. I fetched him here for you, Lazar. It's one way of trappin' the smart Aleck."

"Throw your guns away, Lawler," Lazar ordered. "You won't need that saddle gun and six-shooter. Throw 'em away. Then step down. My *hombrecitos* will hogtie you."

Spike knew when it was time to quit. He hadn't any part of a fighting chance. He tossed his six-shooter and carbine on the ground. Three heavily armed Mexican 'breeds tied his hands behind his back and then the noose of a raw-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hide reata was dropped over his head; the rope was thrown over a tree limb and pulled almost taut and tied. As long as Spike stood erect with his back against the big sycamore tree, the noose would not tighten around his neck. But any struggle he might make meant strangulation.

He stood erect.

Big Dud had kicked his feet out of the stirrups, flung his right leg over the saddlehorn and jumped to the ground.

Lazar came out of the house now. He had a six-shooter in one hand and a half emptied bottle of Shane McTeague's Irish whisky in the other. His right shoulder, wounded by the knife Spike had thrown, was bandaged. He walked stiffly from the cholla spines that he had been unable to get picked clean from his legs and back.

"There's cold chisels and tools in the blacksmith shop, Lazar," said Big Dud. "Knock these handcuffs off me."

"You get locked in your own jail when you was supposed to side me last light at San Onofre," said Lazar, grining wickedly. "You show up here wearin' you own handcuffs when you was supposed to be doublecrossin' Ambrose and deliverin' that Shamrock remuda across the Border.

"When I git around to it I might take a notion to unlock those handcuffs with a key I swiped off you once when you was sleepin' off a drunk at the Box C ranch. But I got no time now to waste on you. Wear 'em, you big clumsy bungler. Go sit down out of the way. I got a game to play with this greenhorn. It's a game I learn' from the Yaquis."

THE sloping foothills around the M Bar ranch were bare save for a scattered growth of giant suhuaro cactus. The suhuaro grows like a tree. A tall, spine covered trunk a couple of feet in circumference. When it reaches a height of ten or fifteen feet it branches into large, weird-shaped arms that grow skyward.

The spines are stiff—and sharp.

Walking stiffly over to where Spike stood stiff backed against the big sycamore, Lazar pointed with the barrel of his six-shooter.

"See that suhuaro on top of the steep hill? The one without any branches. My *hombrecitos* will skin off your clothes when they get you up there. They'll tie your arms and legs around that suhuaro. So that your belly and chest will be pulled tight against it, sabe? Then they will chop down the suhuaro and roll it down the slant with you tied to it. The slant is steep and it's a hundred yards from the top to the bottom of the hill.

"A free ride. Yes."

"You won't be dead when you reach the level ground. But you'll wish you was dead. The spines of the suhuaro are long enough to puncture a million holes in your belly. It will take you a few hours to die slow. You will have time to think what a mistake you made when you threw Lazar into that cholla cactus bush, eh?"

Lazar took a drink and laughed. Spike tore his gaze away from the tall suhuaro on the steep hill and tried to grin.

"Peel the clothes off him, *hombrecitos!*" said Lazar. "Take him up there and rope him to the suhuaro!"

"Listen, Lazar," whined Big Dud, "You'n me has been partners a long time. This ain't no way to treat a man. A joke's a joke—"

"Sure, my *compadre*." Lazar's white teeth showed against his swarthy skin. He shoved his gun into its holster and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked over to where Big Dud stood. Big Dud grinned.

But the grin was short lived. Lazar swung with all his might. His clenched fist caught the town marshal square in the mouth and nose. There was the snapping crunch of broken bone. Blood spurted from Big Dud's smashed nose and the handcuffed man reeled backward and fell awkwardly. Lazar spat into the fallen man's blood smeared face and walked away, his gun in his hand again, the whisky bottle tilted to his mouth.

A couple of his men had begun yanking at Spike's chaps, unsnapping the leather wings and unbucking the chaps belt where it fastened at the back. Another was cutting his shirt and denim jumper off with a sharp knife that was carelessly ripping his hide as well as the cloth.

"When you spoiled my aim in the alley between the Opera House and the Palace," said Lazar to Spike who was half choked by the rope and the rough tactics of the Mexicans, "you put me in bad with Ambrose. You made a thief out of me because I had to steal the money Ambrose promised me for the killin' of Jess Claggett. That is now too bad for you, eh?"

Spike didn't answer.

Lazar stood directly in front of Spike. He forgot that the lanky Montanan's long legs were not tied. Spike kicked with all the desperate strength of a long leg that was saddle-muscled. The narrow toe and high heel of his boot caught Lazar in the groin. Pain twisted Lazar's face as he doubled up. Spike kicked again. It was like a mule kicking. His long heel caught Lazar under the point of his jaw. The jawbone snapped like a dry stick. Lazar lay like a dead man there on the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

BOBTAIL WILDCAT

SPIKE had thrown himself off balance so that the rawhide reata had slipped tight around his throat and he was choking. He got both feet on the ground again and twisted his head and neck, loosening the rope in its heavy rawhide hondo just enough to get his breath.

One of Lazar's men was within range of Spike's long legs. Spike risked strangulation and kicked the man savagely in the stomach. Kicked him in the face as he doubled up. The rope around Spike's neck had slipped tight again and he was gasping for breath, pulling himself erect again.

A lone rider was coming down the trail, spurring his horse to a run. Spike recognized Bobtail. He tried to yell but his voice was choked in his throat. One of Lazar's four men took a shot at the charging rider. Bobtail's gun spewed fire and the Mexican 'breed let out a yelp of pain. Bobtail was riding like a drunken Indian; his six-shooter was spitting streaks of flame. The round white Arizona moon showed every detail of that quick scene with an almost daylight clarity and vividness.

Bobtail Boggs, who had the reputation of being always a day late and a dollar short, was coming alone. Discounting whatever danger might be lurking in the black shadows at the M Bar ranch, he was spurring his Shamrock horse to a run, and shooting to kill.

Bobtail emptied his six-shooter and threw it away the way a small boy discards a worn-out toy. He had another six-shooter in his hand and it was throwing lead like a gatling gun.

Lazar had fetched four men here to the M Bar ranch. Spike had kicked the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wind out of one of them. Bobtail's first shot had crippled a second. His rapid gunfire had downed another. The fourth ran for the brush, vaulted into his saddle and rode off at a run, headed for the safety of his Mexican hills. The 'breed who had been kicked in the stomach managed to get his horse and follow his fleeing companion.

Spike, half conscious, half choked, was swaying on his feet as Bobtail slid his horse to a halt. He tossed aside his second empty six-shooter and fumbled in his chaps pocket for his jackknife. Wheezing like a broken-winded horse, he got the blade open and cut the rawhide reata. Then he was on the ground cutting the hogging string that fastened Spike's hands behind his back. He stumbled over Lazar's inert body, kicked it impatiently, cussing breathlessly.

Then Bobtail spied the half filled bottle of whisky on the ground near Lazar. He uncorked it, sniffed, then tipped it up and drank.

One of Lazar's men was moaning with pain. Bobtail cussed him wheezily and the 'breed shut up. The other wounded man had quit breathing and lay face downward in the dust, dead. Big Dud had rolled over into the shelter of some brush and now was sitting up, his face covered with blood, his bleared eyes shifting uneasily.

"I just played a hunch and cold trailed yuh, boss," Bobtail answered Spike's quizzical grin. "Long Henry and the Powder River Kid was on the prowl fer the Box C remuda and when they cut my sign I turned over the Shamrock cavvy and two prisoners to 'em. Then I trailed you and the big policeman.

"And I wasn't no day late ner no dollar short, if you'll notice. And I had them two extra six-shooters I taken off Big Dud's two men. I thought you'd bin hung and it kinda riled me. When one gun was emptied I throwed 'er into the breeze. Used up the second gun and was ready to use my own when I take notice that the battle is over and it's time fer the shoutin'.

"I didn't aim to hit the policeman and I don't recollect cuttin' down Lazar, but there they are, Spike. And boss or no boss you'll git a trimmin', you long-laigged young wart-hawg if you come that 'day late and a dollar short' on me again."

"All you need now," said Spike, "is to fill a bobtail flush and you kin ramrod the Box C outfit till you die of old age."

Bobtail Boggs swelled for all the world like a newly elected Mayor. He waved the whisky bottle and took a drink.

"You look," he said, gazing at Spike's torn shirt and knife scratched hide, "like you'd bin tryin' to kiss a wildcat."

From inside the house came muffled groaning and the crash of some piece of furniture overturned.

SPIKE spied his six-shooter lying on the ground. He grabbed it and ran for the house, Bobtail at his heels. He pulled up short when he had gotten inside. The scuffling sounds and moaning grunts were coming from somewhere near him in the blackness. Spike risked lighting a match.

On the floor, gagged by his neck handkerchief and bound hand and foot to a big chair he'd overturned, lay Jess Claggett. Spike lit the lamp on the table and cut Claggett free.

"That's twice you've saved my bacon," Jess Claggett said, gasping. "Your Box C remuda is in Shane McTeague's corral. Lazar was driftin' 'em

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into Mexico. I cut his sign and trailed him here. I aimed to kill him and git my string of Shamrock horses. Then mebby I'd set you afoot and give McTeague and Gifford plenty of time to drift your Box C cattle through the Yaqui Pass into Mexico tonight. But I run into a trap Lazar had set and got ketched.

"Lazar was gettin' all set to torture me some before he killed me. He's always hated my insides. He's one of Ambrose's hired hands; he was sent with his gun totin' crew to the Box C outfit to keep me from cheatin' on Ambrose who'd held my outfit in debt since a bad drought flattened me out some years ago.

"Lazar had me gagged before I could holler to you. And from where he had me tied in that damned chair I watched and heard everything that went on out yonder. My hat's off to you, Lawler. And it's off to your pardner Bobtail. Stake me to a gun and I'll side you from here on, even if you did steal my girl."

"Nobody stole your girl, Jess." Spike had picked up Jess Claggett's cartridge belt and six-shooter from the table. He handed them to the black haired, battered looking young cowman.

Jess Claggett took the filled cartridge belt and holstered gun. The next second the gun was in Claggett's hand. It spewed a sudden streak of fire. The bullet passed between Spike and Bobtail.

Lazar, his broken jaw sagging crookedly, swayed drunkenly in the doorway. His black eyes were wide with the stare of death. The cocked gun in his hand exploded and the heavy lead slug tore into the plank floor. Jess Claggett's bullet had torn through the half-breed's heart.

"It was your back," said Jess Claggett, knocking the empty shell from his smoking gun, "that Lazar was aimin' at this time, Lawler. That squares one debt I owed yuh."

Spike grinned faintly and nodded. Then he whirled and ran outside. Big Dud Dudley, free of his handcuffs, held a six-shooter in his hand. He dropped the gun as if it were a hot iron and held up his hands.

"Don't kill me, Lawler! Lazar was makin' me back his play!" Big Dud's blood smeared face work convulsively.

Spike picked up the gun Big Dud had been given by Lazar. He sent the town marshal into the house with a well placed kick. He stumbled over Lazar's dead body and stood there.

"Big Dudley," Spike told Jess Claggett, "and his pardner Lazar killed the two Robertsons. Long Henry and the Powder River Kid were hidin' out down in this part of the country and saw the whole play. Like as not that same pair of bushwhackers have done some of the other killin's that have bin credited to you, Claggett. Now's a good time to drag some truth out of the big coyote. Go to work on 'em."

JESS CLAGGETT'S face was drained of blood leaving it grayish under its heavy coat of tan. His black eyes blazed and his voice was tense when he spoke.

"I've bin almighty thick skulled, haven't I Dud? It was you and Lazar who murdered Bob Hayes four years ago after I'd sold Hayes the Box C outfit? Talk fast and straight, Dud. Or so help me, I'll heat a runnin' iron and work on your yellow hide!"

"Ambrose hired us, Jess! He made us do as he said. He sprung me and Lazar outa Yuma prison where we'd done three years. He was always threatenin' to send us back there if we

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't take his orders. Me and Lazar killed Bob Hayes and the Robertsons.

"We planned 'er to throw the blame on you fer the Hayes killin'. Just like we throwed the blame on Shane McTeague fer killin' the Robertson boys. We killed the Robertsons' foreman, Cliff Trent, and throwed the blame square on Pod Clifford.

"But Lazar done the most of the shootin'. I done the decoy work on all of 'em. Used my law badge to fool 'em. Tellin' 'em if they come with me I'd take 'em to where there was rustlin' or beef butcherin' goin' on. Lazar would be layin' in the brush for 'em.

"Don't beat me no more, Jess! I can't stand no more punishment! I'll tell 'er in court. I'll tell enough to hang Ambrose. He hired us. He kep' threatenin' us. Don't, Jess!"

Jess slapped Big Dud across his battered mouth and turned to Spike. The almot habitual scowl no longer pulled the cowman's black brows together.

"Do you know what this means to me Lawler? It means I'm free now to give Ambrose the gun whippin' I've wanted to give him since he hushed up that Bob Hayes killin' and held it over me like an axe. Do Shane McTeague and Pod Clifford know that Big Dud and Lazar murdered the Robertsons and their ramrod Cliff Trent?"

"Not yet," said Spike. "I was fetchin' Big Dud here to make him talk to Shane McTeague"

"Shane and Pod," said Jess Claggett, "are about in the same fix I was. They're forced to work men hired by Ambrose. They're shovin' your Box C cattle through the Yaqui Pass into Mexico right now."

"They won't git them cattle through the Yaqui Pass without doin' battle," said Bobtail, taking another drink from his bottle. "Long Henry and the Powder River Kid and the other boys will be forkin' Shamrock horses by now and five dollars will git you fifty, Claggett, that them Box C cattle don't cross the Mexican line. Long Henry told me to tell you, Spike, that they was headin' hard and fast fer Yaqui Pass."

"Finer fellers than Shane McTeague and Pod Clifford," said Jess Claggett, "never forked a horse. They're not gun fighters. Long Henry and the Powder River Kid—"

"Bobtail and I," said Spike quickly, "will saddle fresh horses and get there as fast as the horses can travel. Claggett, take Big Dud to Sheila's ranch. Hide him out there. And don't leave Sheila McTeague.

"Because if Ambrose gets a hunch his tough hands might get the worst of it, he's hightailin' it for Mexico. And he'll try to take Sheila with him. Because he wants her, for one thing. And in the second place he can use her for protection if he's chased. If he's got her ridin' with him we couldn't open up on him for fear of her gettin' hit by a stray bullet.

"Take Big Dud and get to Sheila's ranch, mister. If Ambrose shows up, you don't need to be told what to do. And get this right. Nobody's stole your girl. She told me so. Rattle your hocks!"

CHAPTER IX

MEET ME AT YAQUI PASS

YAQUI PASS was a notch in the mountains. It was rough, rocky, timber spotted country. In spite of the fact that they rode the best horses in the country, Spike and Bobtail made laborious time in the rough strip where they were unfamiliar with the best trails. Their horses were dripping with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sweat, and impatience had thrown both men into heavy silence. They must have been a mile from Yaqui Pass when the bawling of cattle and the crackle of gunfire came down wind to them.

"It's too late now," uttered Spike, "to save the hides of Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford. I should have told them both last night at San Onofre what Long Henry had told me up in Montana about the murder of the Robertsons and their ramrod Cliff Trent. I had to wear specs and act wise and play 'er cautious.

"I could have jailed Ambrose from the start. I could have slapped that shyster behind the bars and saved all this mess. I damn near got Jess Claggett murdered twice. I come near hauling you, the best friend I've got, into a killer's trap. I almost got myself rolled down a hill tied to a suahuaro.

"And now I've thrown away the lives of Shane McTeague and his pardner Pod Gifford. Long Henry won't call his shots when he sights an enemy. The Powder River Kid shoots and does his questionin' afterward. The other boys in Long Henry's gang are all quick triggered. I've murdered two good men tonight, Bobtail. And one of 'em is the father of the only girl I ever looked at the second time. And if Jess Claggett don't get there in time, that damned Ambrose—"

"You'll be more'n a day late, boss," finished Bobtail, gripping his bottle, a mocking light in his humorous brown eyes, "and more than a dollar short."

"You pick the damndest times to rub it into a man," muttered Spike. He yanked off his hat and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with a tattered sleeve.

"I promised your ol' daddy—"

"That you'd never let me make a fool of myself over any woman," snapped Spike. "That you'd keep me out of trouble.

" 'Don't kill no more men!' you keep yappin' at me whenever there are strangers to listen. I never killed a man in my life. Never even took a shot at a man. And you load these Arizona cowpunchers into thinkin' I'm a tough, gun slingin' son of a gun—"

"You wore them fool specs. I was kinda ashamed fer yuh." There was a soft undertone of mirth in Bobtail Bogg's wheezy voice. He held out the bottle.

"Have a snort of Shane McTeague's Irish fightin' likker, boss."

Spike never drank. But he reached out for the bottle and took several big swallows of the fiery pot-still whisky. He choked and sputtered and Bobtail grabbed the bottle.

They rode as hard as their horses could travel. The shooting was dying out now. Dwindling to a few scattered shots. Then there was only the bawling of milling cattle. The shouts of men Spike heard Long Henry's voice.

"Let 'em mill thataway till they quiet down, boys. Kid, take a man with you and scout around to make sure none of them renegade cattle rustlers come alive and start trouble. You git that wild bunch of steers turned back all right, Shane?"

"Me'n Pod's got 'em bushed up. Them wild 'uns will stay bushed thataway till daybreak. Put a man or two in the Pass to keep 'em from driftin' south and you got your Box C herd as safe as if they was penned in the stockyards. If you're done with us, me'n Pod will hit the trail fer San Onofre. We're hangin' Judge Ambrose to the highest limb we kin find."

Bobtail chuckled. "I kinda fergot to tell you, boss. Long Henry told me

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when I turned over them Shamrock horses to him, that Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford was at the Box C ranch waitin' fer yuh. Long Henry done told 'em about the Robertson and Cliff Trent killin's. But them two cowmen had already talked 'er over and decided to split the blankets with Ambrose. They'd gone to the ranch to throw in with you."

PERHAPS it was the whisky. But Spike wanted to shout. He wanted to yell louder than he'd ever yelled in his life. He slapped Bobtail on the back and cussed him and the paunchy old cowpuncher wheezed and chuckled.

"I done kept that promise I made to your daddy. You don't git into this gun ruckus. And you got outa that girl trouble a heap slicker than I hoped fer. If you got to have a female tanglin' up your life, you could have done worse than git roped and hogtied by Sheila McTeague.

"Any girl that's got the nerve to let a stranger with specs shoot playin' cards outa her hand kin git this bachelor cowhand's blessin' and well wishes. Mebbyso I'm a leetle disappointed in you givin' her up without a scrap to that Jess Claggett feller. Any man with even specs on could see the light in them blue eyes of her'n—"

"Her eyes are smoke gray," snapped Spike, "and she told me she was goin' to marry Jess Claggett."

"Shore thing. And you let it go at that. Well, I done kep' my promise to your daddy and my job's done. I'm finishin' this jag at San Onofre when I go back with Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford to string up that Ambrose thing. But git this through your college-learnt skull, you long-laigged young colt. You're a day late and a dollar short."

Bobtail finished the last drop in the bottle and tossed it in the brush. He was ten jumps ahead of Spike when they rode up to where Long Henry, the Powder River Kid, Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford were sitting their horses in the moonlight.

"Never lost a man!" Long Henry called out. "Shane and Pod had hired more'n half the men away from Ambrose and they done most of the gun fightin'. Here's your cattle, Spike. And you kin shake hands with a pair of the best neighbors any cowman ever had."

Bobtail produced a sealed quart of Irish whisky and handed it to Shane McTeague.

"I sighted it settin' on the kitchen shelf and fetched it along just in case. To celebrate the killin' of Lazar."

"What," asked Spike when his right hand had been half paralized by Shane McTeague's hearty grip, "is the shortest route to Sheila's ranch?"

"Just give that Shamrock geldin' his head," said Shane McTeague, "and he'll take you there. And good luck to ye, Spike."

JUDGE Ambrose, alias Ambrose Burkett, and several other names he had used along his crooked, well covered past, was a man who never took chances with what is called Luck. He had taken the two checks for thirty thousand dollars apiece to the bank. But the agreement had been locked in his safe.

He had cashed the two checks and had told the banker that they closed the deal on the Box C ranch. He had drawn all his money from the bank and now there was more than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars neatly folded in the soft leather money belt he wore buckled around his middle next to his skin. He had milked his San Onofre

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cattle dealings dry. Let Lawler and the others fight it out.

He had discarded his frock coat and black trousers for shabby range clothes. Besides his pearl handled sneak-gun which he now wore in an armpit holster under his denim jacket, he carried a six-shooter in a holster that hung from a filled cartridge belt. And there was a carbine in his saddle scabbard.

Hermosillo, Mexico was to be his first stop. Then the seaport of Guaymas. He would charter a boat there and transfer to a South America bound tramp steamer.

His shortest and safest way out would be to simply to ride across the Border at San Onofre. But Ambrose was not going alone to South America. He was taking with him the only woman he had ever wanted. And she would go with him when he showed her proof that he could hang her father, Shane McTeague, for the murder of the Robertson brothers.

Ambrose was afraid of Spike Lawler. Lawler knew too much about law. And Lawler was shrewd enough to dig up something out of the past of the man who called himself Judge Ambrose. McTeague and Gifford were becoming hard to handle. Jess Claggett was on the loose and dangerous. This Long Henry and his gang were working in with Spike Lawler. Lazar had robbed Ambrose of two thousand dollars and turned broncho. Big Dud had a yellow streak and would get long tongued if ever he was put on the witness stand.

Thus Ambrose read the handwriting on the wall and decided to pull stakes. But he was taking Sheila with him. He headed for the Shamrock ranch where Big Dud was holding those horses on a writ of attachment. He'd use Big Dud to cover his trail into Mexico.

Ambrose found Sheila alone at the ranch. The Chinese cook had Big Dud's bone handled six-shooter shoved in the waistband of his cotton pants. Sheila was a little pale and defiant. Ambrose took her into the patio and there told her that her father's life was in her hands.

He was talking to her and she was listening in white lipped silence when they heard the sound of shod hoofs outside. Ambrose moved as softly and swiftly as some cat footed animal. He quit the patio and looked out through the darkened window of an outside room. He saw Jess Claggett ride up with two men. They halted at the barn. Jess told the two men to turn their horses loose. Then Jess rode on to the house.

A sudden panic gripped Ambrose. He thought he had recognized Big Dud but the man's face was swathed in bandages and he couldn't make certain of his identity. The other man seemed to be wounded. Jess Claggett was acting like a man who held a winning hand. Ambrose could see Jess's face in the moonlight. Jess was grinning as he swung from his saddle and started for the house.

AMBROSE waited no longer. His sneak-gun was in his hand. The window was open. He pulled the trigger and Jess Claggett staggered, clawing for his gun. Ambrose shot twice. He heard Sheila's scream somewhere behind him. He saw her run into the kitchen and grab the bone handled six-shooter from the cook.

With two unknown men at the barn Ambrose was taking no more chances. His horse was hidden out back in the brush. He went out through the window, rounded the corner of the house as Sheila shot at him from the kitchen doorway, then raced for his horse. He

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard somebody at the barn yelling. Then he was in the saddle, spurring his horse to a dead run.

He rode half a dozen miles before he slowed down to a road trot and took a drink from the bottle he carried in his saddle pocket. The whisky steadied his nerves but could not deaden his regret at having lost Sheila McTeague. He took another stiff drink. And still another. Then he corked the bottle and shoved it back into his saddle pocket.

He told himself that he'd have to stay sober till he was on that South America boat. The Argentine was famous for its beautiful women. His infatuation for Sheila McTeague would be forgotten.

Ambrose headed for the Mexican Border. He told himself that his trail ahead was wide open. Strapped around his middle was a fortune. Ambrose had the world by the tail. He allowed himself another drink. He was shoving the cork in the bottle when a bend in the trail brought him within fifty yards of a rider who was headed toward him at a long trot. The rider was Spike Lawler.

Spike Lawler—the man who was smashing Ambrose's dream of becoming cattle king of the San Onofre cow country. Ambrose slid his sneak-gun from its armpit holster.

Spike had not recognized Ambrose. He had never seen the lawyer in any clothes except the spotted black frock coat, the baggy black pants and rusty patent-leather shoes. But tonight's dangerous work had made Spike doubly cautious. Every rider he met tonight was an enemy until proven otherwise. His hand dropped to his six-shooter and he snapped:

"Throw up your hands!"

Spike caught the glint of shining steel in the moonlight. He jumped his horse off the trail as that nickle-plated gun spat flame. The heavy, hot slug ripped Spike's right shoulder. He grabbed his gun with his left hand and it was firing before his grip on its butt tightened. The rider's head jerked back and Spike recognized the gray, long jawed face.

Another bullet tore Spike's cheek. Then he was riding straight at Ambrose and firing as fast as he could thumb back the hammer and pull the trigger. His gun was empty before Ambrose sagged drunkenly in his saddle and pitched sideways and headlong to the ground.

Spike's right shoulder had been smashed by a bullet. The side of his face had been ripped wide open and was streaming blood. He got his horse calmed down and managed to reload his six-shooter before he dismounted and bent over the motionless form that lay in a crumpled heap in the yellow dust of the trail.

Ambrose was dead. Every shot Spike had fired had hit its target. His endless hours of target practice, of juggling guns and shooting left handed had stood him in good stead tonight. For the first time in his life he had aimed a gun at a man and pulled the trigger.

Spike fastened a crude tourniquet around his wounded shoulder and stopped the flow of blood in his torn cheek. He was covering the dead man's face with his jacket when it occurred to him that Ambrose might be quitting the country. And he wouldn't be leaving San Onofre broke. He found the money belt and buckled it around his own middle. He found the attorney's saddle bags stuffed with papers. And he helped himself to a drink of Ambrose's whiskey and took the bottle along when he mounted and headed for the Shamrock ranch.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He needed that whiskey, to brace him against the possibilities of what he might find at his destination.

He wondered if Ambrose had stopped there. If Jess Claggett had reached there. Would he find Sheila wounded or dead? Tortured by uncertainty, he pushed hard for the Shamrock ranch, leading Ambrose's saddled horse.

CHAPTER X

JUGGLER'S RETURN

LIGHTS showed at the adobe ranch house. The first streak of dawn was reddening the sky as he rode up. Weak and dizzy from pain and loss of blood, he had been pulling at Ambrose's bottle to dull his agony and nausea. His eyes were a little blurred by the whisky when he pulled up at the hitchrack in front of the house.

He thought: well, here goes. Whatever it is, this is better than the dread of waiting. . . . And then he saw her, and his eyes cleared.

Sheila McTeague recognized him in spite of his bandaged face and shoulder. She saw him bloodstained and naked to the waist save for soggy red bandages. She dropped Big Dud's six-shooter. As Spike dismounted uncertainly, she ran to him, and then suddenly her nerve cracked and she was sobbing brokenly and Spike's good arm was around her holding her tight. And behind the sodden bandages there was a grin of Spike's face.

Now it was all right. Everything was all right.

Sheila sobbed out the story of Jess Claggett's shooting. Jess had lived nearly half an hour, she said. Long enough to tell her he had never murdered any man. That Big Dud and Lazar had done the killings that had been laid to Jess Claggett and Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford.

"Tie to Spike Lawler, Sheila. And good luck to you both." Those had been Jess Claggett's dying words and Sheila repeated them when Spike told her that he'd ridden here as fast as he could travel to give Jess a run for his money; that for the first time in his life he was really in love.

Her smile was very tender then, better than any medicine.

Sheila and the Chinese cook had Big Dud and Lazar's Mexican 'breed locked in the cellar. The Chinaman was a sort of herb doctor and had had some experience in setting broken bones and mending gunshot and knife wounds. He had Spike patched up by the time Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford and Bobtail got there.

It was getting light now; getting ready to be a fine day.

Spike showed McTeague and Gifford and Bobtail the filled money belt. In the dead Ambrose's saddle bags they found papers that showed how Ambrose had been robbing Claggett, McTeague, and Gifford over a period of years. Also the signed wager that the lawyer had never posted at the bank. And they knew that he had cashed the two thirty-thousand-dollar checks.

"Take ninety thousand dollars," Shane McTeague told Spike. "You won the bet. Ambrose fills the grave that Lazar dug in the Box C boothill. We'll dig 'er bigger and plant Lazar with 'im. Jess would like to be buried here on Sheila's ranch, I reckon.

"He thought a heap of Sheila in his own wild, tough way. But she never did want to marry him. I knowed that. She had some sorta notion she'd be helpin' me by gettin' hitched to Jess.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But I told her on the way home from town that I wasn't goin' to let her marry nobody but the man she loved. But her and Jess had always bin friends and Jess would like it, bein' buried here."

They were sitting in the front room with a bottle and glasses. Spike slipped out into the patio and Sheila was there, sitting on the old bench. Spike sat down beside her and held her with his one good arm.

"Standing the girl you love against a plank wall and shootin' cards she's holdin' in her hands," said Spike, his blue eyes bright with amusement. "Stealin' her horses. It's an odd way of goin' courtin'."

"And those awful steel rimmed glasses." She smiled up at him.

Spike chuckled softly and his arm tightened around her. Sheila pulled his bandaged head down and kissed his mouth.

That was good medicine, too.

"I hope this arm won't be stiff," he said after a while. "A stiff arm would be a handicap to a man who's learnin' to juggle ten beer bottles. And I'll never be able to do that gun juggling act again, I'm afraid. Just when I find a pardner with steady nerves, too."

"I always had a notion," said Sheila, her gray eyes smiling, "that Jess Claggett wanted to marry me for those Shamrock horses. And now you disillusion a gal by telling her that you picked her for a team-mate in a jugglin' show and aimed to use her for a human target."

Sheila took from her blouse pocket the twisted steel rims that were all that remained of Spike's spectacles. She straightened them out and hung the hooks over his ears, fitting the steel rims over his bandages. She laughed up into his eyes and kissed him.

SHANE McTEAGUE came out into the patio. Sheila laughed and pointed at Spike who looked comical enough with the steel rims and bandaged face.

"That's what I drew out of the pig-in-a-poke scramble, Shane," she said gaily. "A juggler!"

"You could do worse," said the red-bearded cowman, tossing the filled money belt at them. "He juggled things good enough to git back all the money he put into the Box C outfit and got you to boot. And I just heard Bobtail say that you're the only girl he ever found that he'd let Spike marry.

"And another thing we got to get straight right now." Shane jabbed a blunt finger at the money belt.

"This money's all yourn, Spike. Me'n Pod talked 'er over. We ain't takin' none of it like you said. We've got our outfits back, all clear, and we'll pool 'em with yours and you're to be general manager and Bobtail will ramrod the outfit. Long Henry and the Powder River Kid and them other boys is willin' to quit the hoot-owl trail and kinda settle down here in the San Onofre country.

"If anybody comes after 'em with some old indictment and a bench warrant they kin step acrost the Border handy." He stood there, a grin on his face, thumbs hooked in his slanted cartridge belt. Bobtail's beaming face showed in the doorway behind him. And Pod Gifford appeared with a drink in his gnarled hand.

A very nice morning.

"The sun's just risin'," Shane said, his eyes softening. "I don't know of a better time or place for me to give you both a father's blessin'. Me'n Pod an' Bobtail drinks to your good luck and happiness!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And as long as we ride Shamrock horses," put in Pod Gifford, "we'll never any of us be afoot. Here's howdy!"

"I'm gittin' that soft hearted," said Bobtail, "that I hope the judge and jury at Tucson let Big Dud off with a easy jolt. I didn't quite keep my promise to your daddy, young feller. But you did save Ambrose from hangin'. And if I was forty years younger and fifty pounds lighter I'd give you a run fer your money. If ever I'd met up with a girl like her, I'd mebbyso have let her saw my horns off. If your daddy was alive he'd be sayin' it for me. God bless yuh both!"

Bobtail shook hands with them.

As Bobtail shook hands with them, Sheila kissed him and he turned the color of a Navajo blanket.

"Stock up with tin dishes," he blurted hurriedly to cover his embarrassment. "Because directly that arm of his is limber he'll be jugglin' again. And when he commences tossin' six-shooters in the air, let me know and I'll slip up behind him and tap him between the horns with a wagon spoke."

Then Bobtail and Shane McTeague and Pod Gifford headed for the barn to do their celebrating in cowpuncher fashion. Spike and Sheila were left alone in the patio that was drenched in the morning sunshine.

For a long time they sat there, saying very little.

A mocking bird left its nest to perch in the highest limb of the big old hackberry tree and filled the morning with its song.

THE END

"I'm your husband"

That's what four men told a beautiful young girl—yet she had never before met any of them.—Then one by one, as mysteriously as they appeared they began to die. What sinister shadow hung over them? Why should they claim marriage to this bewildered girl? Will she benefit by their deaths?

The answers to these questions show up in the startling, unusual, exciting mystery story entitled ***"The Husbands of Emily"*** complete in the **February 17th DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. Philip Ketchum,** that master of fast-moving detective yarns is the author . . . and that means plenty. Make a date to meet Emily today. ***Buy the February 17th issue of***

DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

A RED STAR ***QUALITY*** MAGAZINE!

Now at all newsstands.....10c

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

A SHY correspondent of ours, energetic and anonymous, has compiled some interesting statistics about ARGOSY authors. Tables, ratings and such have a fascination for us, as readers of this department know; undoubtedly it is because we are incapable of organizing statistics ourselves. We admire the mathematical mind from afar.

The letter below reveals, among other things, that Theodore Roscoe has appeared on our contents page more often than anyone else during the last six years. We haven't had the time to check on this fact; we take our anonymous friend's word for it. This week happens to be one of the few out of the last three hundred odd that does not offer Mr. Roscoe to ARGOSY readers; but we dedicate the issue to him anyway. When you consider that all his work has a special quality of his own, that he never permits himself to become commonplace, his achievement seems even more remarkable. So this ARGOSY is for Theodore Roscoe; and being an intensely modest man, he would probably rather have it than one in which his own name appeared.

ANONYMOUS

The "Statistical Nut", that's me. What with the national census at hand and 1939 departed, I'm buzzing along at a crazy pace. Here are a few examples that the readers of ARGOSY might be interested in.

Allowing one point for each appearance on the title page, here is the list of leading authors in ARGOSY during 1939. For example, a six-part story would give the author six points.

Roscoe, Theodore	16
Sale, Richard	15
Ketchum, Philip	14
Foster, Bennett	11
Carse, Robert	11
Pierce, Frank R.	10

And here are the leaders since the bee stung me in the brain back in '34:

Roscoe, Theodore	81
Pierce, Frank	64
Adams, Eustace	64
Brand, Max	56
Bedford-Jones	54
Chase, Borden	53
Tuttle, W. C.	52

For each year, here are the winners:

1934	MacIsaac, Fred	14
	Roscoe, Theodore	14
1935	Bedford-Jones	19
	Worts, George	18
1936	Bedford-Jones	19
	Adams, Eustace	17
1937	Adams, Eustace	20
	Pierce, Frank R.	20
1938	Forester, C. S.	18
	Pierce, Frank R.	16

From this we find that all of them except Chase appeared at least once during the 1939 publishing of ARGOSY.

No, I'm not done get. Here are some more figures and facts.

124 different authors appeared in ARGOSY in 1939, 121 in 1938.

Now for the Argonotes department which has been taking a bad beating of late. In 1936 there were 232 letters published; in 1937 it dropped to 201; in 1938 this was reduced to 107, about half of the previous average; and in 1939 the total was 101 a new low.

During this four-year period letters have been received from 45 states, all except Alabama, North Dakota and New Hampshire. Better send an agent up with a few copies. We can't disgrace these states. New York has produced the most letters printed: In '36—42, '37—33, '38—16, and '39—18. Illinois and California also rank at the top.

Alaska, Hawaii, and the Canal Zone are represented. So are these Canadian districts:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alberta, B. Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba. The foreign countries are England, Australia, Scotland, Tanganyika, Malta, and Newfoundland.

That should be enough for this year, so I'll crawl back into my ledgers and leave you to your own troubles.

P. S.—I don't dare sign my name or the fly catcher will be after me with an exterminator. The Flit, Hamilcar!

About the shrinkage in Argonotes noted above: We've deliberately cut down on the department because we felt that the readers would want all the possible space devoted to stories. However, if you feel uncomfortably cramped, do please let us know and Hamilcar will personally assure you room for both elbows and a knee . . . . One more thing, the non-apparent Borden Chase is returning to these pages with what can only be described as a double-edged bang, in "The Sun Sets at Five," beginning in the ARGOSY for March 2nd.

LOOKING AHEAD!

THE GREEN FLAME

The terror of the vanishing bodies of men, eaten by lambent tongues; the warning of a world to be utterly consumed by quick venomous fire, beyond the ken of any Science; the fiendish plans of a mortal so loathsome that he was known only as Toad—reason enough for the tense secret conferences in the Treasury Building in Melbourne. And but one survivor, to tell the history of those agonizing days. A gripping novel by

ERIC NORTH

THEN PLACID JOHN ADAMS

Placid, was he? That's what the history books say. But here he is, excitingly brought to life—harassed and testy, snappish and magnificently human. Even history admits that once he got so furious with Congress that he went A.W.O.L. for three months. We give you the story of what might have happened in those ninety days, of how John Adams raised his eyes from the frets of state to discover America—and himself. A superb novelet by

THEODORE ROSCOE

SUICIDE SID

Here's a toast to those landlocked rioters of the bounding main—the raffish brotherhood of the Bilge and the Binnacle. In a misguided moment they adopt Sidney, the Human Weasel, who goes casually to his death six nights a week, matinees Wednesday and Friday the 13th. A lively novelet by

CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—FEBRUARY 24th

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HOT WATER with SPEED KING

From Any Electric Light Socket

Millions need SPEED KING—the amazing disc that you drop into any pan, pail or basin of water and plug into any 110-volt socket. CHEAP and FAST. Small in size.

SAMPLES for Agents - Send Name

Write quick—for my SAMPLE OFFER—FREE! Get an actual sample SPEED KING for making demonstrations. You can make plenty of cash as my agent. HURRY! Send no money! Just your name. L. B. Patterson, Pres.

NU-WAY CO., Des Moines, Iowa Dept. 352, Walnut Bldg.

60-SECOND Demonstration

BACKACHE?

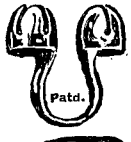
Try Flushing Excess Poisons
And Acid Thru Kidneys
And Stop Getting Up Nights

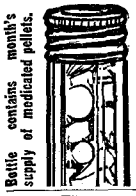
35 CENTS PROVES IT

When your kidneys are overtaxed and your bladder is irritated and passage scanty and often smarts and burns, you may need Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules, a fine harmless stimulant and diuretic that starts to work at once and costs but 35 cents at any modern drugstore.

It's one good safe way to put more healthy activity into kidneys and bladder — you should sleep more soundly the whole night through. But be sure to get **GOLD MEDAL** — it's a genuine medicine for weak kidneys — right from Haarlem in Holland. Don't accept a substitute.

Asthma-Catarrh





NEW INVENTION
Brings Instant Relief

If you suffer from Asthma or Catarrh, this advertisement is a message of hope to you. Breathe-O-Lator is simple and easy to use. It fits snugly into your nose, and your body heat vaporizes the medicated oils of the saturated pellets penetrating every fold and crevice of the nasal passages, throat, and Bronchial tubes. It **"relieves as you breathe."** It is invisible and can be worn anywhere, night and day, and is equally beneficial for head colds, and sinus headaches. **You cannot appreciate the amazing relief that Breathe-O-Lator will bring until you have tried it.** "Wonderful remedy," say grateful users. Special half price offer—only $1 plus 10c for packing and delivery charges. Order today and enjoy the blessed relief that the Breathe-O-Lator treatment is **guaranteed** to bring you.

BREATHE-O-LATOR LABORATORIES
317 E. 34th St., Dept. AC-5, N. Y. City

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. Successful graduates in every section of the U. S. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 258-L Chicago
A Correspondence Institution

SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

Thousands of people are disabled every hour of the day. Don't let sickness or accident find you unprepared.

WE PAY YOU CASH

$8,000.00 Accumulated Cash For Accidental Death
$8,000.00 Accumulated Cash For Loss of Hands, Eyes or Feet
$250.00 For Accidents
$200.00 For Sickness
$100.00 Financial Aid
All as specified in the Policy
COST TO YOU ONLY $1 MONTHLY

COSTS ONLY $1 PER MONTH

The **"Security" Sickness and Accident Policy** gives your family quick cash when income is stopped. Pays CASH protection of **$25.00 a week** up to ten weeks for accident—$25.00 **each week** for sickness, as specified in policy—and up to $8,000.00 for accidental death, loss of hands, eyes or feet. Also other liberal features. Examine this **new Security Policy** on our 10-day Free Inspection Offer!

NO PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

Any person may apply. Ages 16 to 75, man or woman. No physical examination. The Security Policy sold by mail. No agent will call. The Arcadia Mutual Casualty Company is a safe company—not an association or assessment company. It has the approval of the Illinois State Insurance Department.

SEND NO MONEY Just mail the coupon for complete information. You alone judge and decide. Don't wait until it's too late.

THE ARCADIA MUTUAL CASUALTY CO., Desk 28-A **NO AGENT WILL CALL**
75 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me complete information and tell me how I may get the "Security" Policy for 10-Day Free Inspection without obligation.

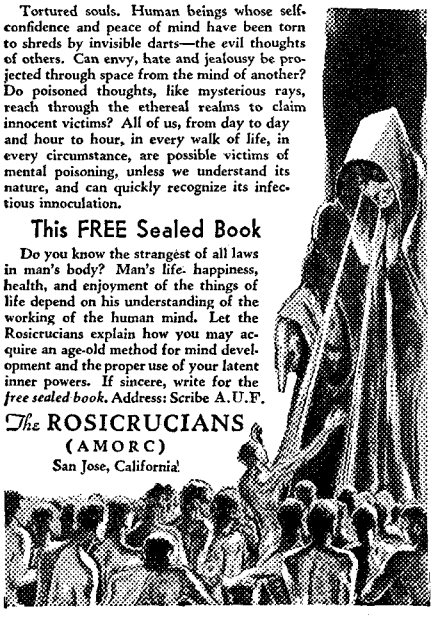
Name_____

Address_____

Mental Poisoning!

Thoughts that Enslave Minds

Tortured souls. Human beings whose self-confidence and peace of mind have been torn to shreds by invisible darts—the evil thoughts of others. Can envy, hate and jealousy be projected through space from the mind of another? Do poisoned thoughts, like mysterious rays, reach through the ethereal realms to claim innocent victims? All of us, from day to day and hour to hour, in every walk of life, in every circumstance, are possible victims of mental poisoning, unless we understand its nature, and can quickly recognize its infectious innoculation.



This FREE Sealed Book

Do you know the strangest of all laws in man's body? Man's life- happiness, health, and enjoyment of the things of life depend on his understanding of the working of the human mind. Let the Rosicrucians explain how you may acquire an age-old method for mind development and the proper use of your latent inner powers. If sincere, write for the *free sealed book.* Address: Scribe A.U.F.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
San Jose, California

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THOUSANDS NOW PLAY

who never thought they could!

Learned Quickly at Home

I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time. *H. C. S., Calif.

Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course. *W. H. S., Alabama

Wouldn't Take $1,000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course. *S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning. *B. F., Bronx, N. Y.

Best Method by Far

Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best. *A. O., Minn.

***Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.**

You, too, can play any instrument By this EASY A-B-C Method

YOU think it's difficult to learn music: That's what thousands of others have thought! Just like you, they longed to play some instrument—the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorites. But they denied themselves the pleasure—because they thought it took months and years of tedious study to learn.

LEARN IN SPARE TIME AT HOME

And then they made an amazing discovery! They learned about a wonderful way to learn music at home—without a private teacher—without tedious study—and in a surprisingly short time. They wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the facts about this remarkable short-cut method. And the facts opened their eyes!

The result? Over 700,000 men and women have studied music at home this simple, A-B-C way. Now, all over the world, enthusiastic music-lovers are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of creating their own music. They have found the key to good times, popularity and profit.

ONLY A FEW CENTS A DAY

And that's what you can do, right now. Get the proof that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument—quickly, easily, in spare time at home. Never mind if you have no musical knowledge, training or talent. If you are truly interested, just send for the fascinating illustrated booklet that fully explains all about the famous U. S. School of Music method. Tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) U. S. School of Music, 1032 Brunswick Bldg., New York City. *Forty-second year. (Established 1898).*

INSTRUMENTS

As a special accommodation to our students we can supply instruments at a special discount. Liberal terms extended. For particulars, inquire Instrument Dept.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, 1032 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free, illustrated booklet, "How To Learn Music At Home."

PIANO	HAWAIIAN GUITAR	TROMBONE
VIOLIN	BANJO	FLUTE
GUITAR	MANDOLIN	PICCOLO
PIANO ACCORDION	UKULELE	ORGAN
PLAIN ACCORDION	CORNET	DRUMS AND TRAPS
SAXOPHONE	TRUMPET	MODERN ELEMENTARY HARMONY
CELLO	HARP	VOICE CULTURE
	CLARINET	

Have you
Name ..... This Instru.? .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ Check here for Booklet A, if under 16 years of age.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED